

ROUGH RIDER

WEEKLY

THE BEST WILD WEST STORIES PUBLISHED

Issued Weekly. By subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Application made at the N. Y. Post Office for entry as Second-class Matter.

No. 149

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 23, 1907.

Price, Five Cents

KING OF THE WILD WEST'S FIRST SNOW CAMP

or Stella lost in the Wilderness



BY NED TAYLOR

Each leap brought the great gray wolf closer. The next jump might reach her. Then a well-known yell was wafted on the frozen air. The boys had come.



ROUGH RIDER



WEEKLY

THE BEST WILD WEST STORIES PUBLISHED

Issued Weekly. By subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Application made at the N. Y. Post Office for entry as Second-class Matter.

No. 149.

NEW YORK, February 23, 1907.

Price Five Cents.

King of the Wild West's First Snow Camp

OR,

STELLA LOST IN THE WILDERNESS.

By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE BIG SNOW.

"We're going to have snow to-night!"

Ted Strong, King of the Wild West, was sitting on the back of Sultan, his noble little black stallion, on the ridge of a prairie-swell, looking at a lowering sky.

Out of the northwest chilling wind, damp and raw, was sweeping dull gray clouds before it.

Ted had addressed his remark to Bud Morgan, his chum and able lieutenant, who threw a glance at the clouds and grunted.

"I reckon we be," he muttered, "an' I'm free ter say I'm dern sorry ter hear it."

"It's hard luck," resumed Ted. "If we had got away a week earlier, or hadn't been held up by the high water at Poplar Fork, we would have been at the ranch now, and settled for the winter."

"Thar's no telling whar an 'if' won't land yer some-times. If we hadn't started we wouldn't hev been here at all. But here we air, an' we'll hev ter git out o' it."

"Think we better push on, or make camp?" asked Ted.

"Got ter make camp fer ther night somewhere," answered Bud. "But I wisht ther storm hed held off till ter-morrer this time; we'd hev been within hootin' distance o' ther Long Tom Ranch."

"Suppose we push on a few hours more. We can camp down in the dark if we must. If the snow gets deep before we reach the high ground you know what it means."

"I shore do. I wuz all through a big snow in this yere man's country a few years back, an' it wuz some fierce."

"All right. Ride back and drive them up. I'll point. We'll drive until it gets too dark. Tell the wagons to move up."

Bud wheeled his pony and dashed to the rear of the great herd of cattle that was coming on at a snail's pace.

The cattle were lowing uneasily. They knew even better than the men that a storm was coming, and they dreaded it.

This was the big Circle S herd which the young rough riders had bought in Texas in the spring of that year, and which they had herded and driven northward throughout the summer to winter on the Montana plateau, later to be driven to Moon Valley, and there put into condition for the market.

Various things had delayed the arrival of the herd on their winter grounds. The abduction of Stella in No Man's Land, and a detention of several days at a time by flood, by a stampede, and by fights with rustlers, had brought the cattle several weeks late to their winter grounds.

Ted Strong had determined to try the experiment of wintering southern cattle in the Montana country in order to harden them and improve the quality of the beef.

The young rough riders had a large order to fill for the government the following summer, and it was to accomplish their contract that they had bought the Texas cattle and driven them north to the Long Tom Ranch in northern Montana.

Now that they were within a few miles of it, and still on the low ground, it appeared that a big snow was inevitable, which might frustrate all their plans and cause them great loss.

But Ted Strong did not complain. It was a condition which he could not have foreseen, and being close at hand there was nothing for them to do but meet it with all the fortitude at their command.

Soon the herd began to move forward, being crowded by the young rough riders and the force of cow-punchers whom they had employed to assist them.

Stella Fosdick, who, with her aunt, Mrs. Walter Graham, had accompanied the boys on their drive, now came galloping up to Ted. She had been riding beside the carriage in which her aunt had been comfortably traveling.

"Going to keep on, Ted?" she asked.

"Yes. Got to do it. Those clouds are full of snow. If it catches us down here we're likely to be snowed in, and if we do it's all up with the Circle S," he replied.

"That's bad."

"Oh, I guess we'll pull through all right, if we can keep the cows moving; but it is not going to be very comfortable for your aunt or you. We'll have to drive until the cattle refuse to move farther."

"I can stand it, and aunt will have to. She's getting a little anxious, though, and asked me to ride ahead to learn when we're going to stop. Poor auntie likes her comfort. I often wonder why she became the wife of a ranchman."

"Or why she consents to traipse all over the country with you," laughed Ted.

"Ted, she absolutely cannot refuse me a thing."

"So I see. You've got her hypnotized—as, indeed, you have all the rest of us. But ride back and cheer her up all you can. I told McCall, the cook, to make some good strong coffee and to serve it to any of the boys who wanted it, as it will be some time before we can have supper. Have Mac take her a cup of good strong coffee and something to eat. That may make her a little more cheerful."

"I'll do it. But don't you want some coffee, too?"

"Not for me. I've got something else to do right here. This is going to be a race between the herd and the snow-clouds, and it means a whole lot to us."

"Afraid of being snowed in?"

"You bet. If this bunch of cattle gets snowed in I see our finish. We'll lose half of them before we get to the grass."

"I don't know a thing about the northern range, and I can't see how you're going to bring that herd through to spring. It would take thousands of tons of hay, and I don't know how much corn to feed them."

Ted laughed.

"I see you don't know much about the north," he said. "But what should a girl brought up in Texas know of wintering cattle in the snow? You see, it's this way: Montana is the best winter cattle-range in the United States."

"The winds from the mountains sweep the snow, which is dry and loose, from the high, level ground, exposing the grass which has been cured on the ground, and which makes the best kind of feed. Then there is plenty of water, and the deep coulees, with which the country is cut up, afford ample protection for the cattle during storms."

"Occasionally there comes warm winds from the northwest. These are called chinook winds, because they come from the direction of the country of the Chinook Indians. They are warm and balmy, and melt the snow as if by magic. Their warmth is caused by having come in contact with the Japanese stream, which crosses the Pacific Ocean, after being warmed in the sunny East, and which strikes the shores of North America along about south Alaska. This stream is called by the Japanese, Kuro Siwo. It is the equivalent of the Gulf Stream, which leaves the Gulf of Mexico to cross the Atlantic and warm the shores of Great Britain."

"Quite a lecture," said Stella, laughing.

"I didn't mean to lecture," replied Ted, laughing also, "but I wanted you to know why it is that it is a good thing to winter cattle in this north country. In the first place it puts strength and stamina into the cattle, and makes the beef better, and all the conditions of which I have spoken makes it possible to keep cattle on the open range out here, where one would think they would perish of cold and starvation. But it is no picnic to run a winter range, as we will all learn before spring comes again."

"I understand now, and I'm sure I shall enjoy the experience. But I must go back to aunt and jolly her up, for she is easily discouraged, and she is no more used to rough winters than I."

"She'll be all right when we get to Long Tom, for there is a bully ranch-house there, and she'll be as snug as a bug in a rug when we get settled."

The cattle were going forward over the gently rising ground, being pushed by the punchers in the rear and the fellows on the side-lines, while Ted and Kit were pointing them in the direction of a tall butte, which they could see in the distance, rising needlelike and black against the gray sky.

This was Long Tom Butte, after which the ranch, which Ted had leased, had been named.

Suddenly, Ted felt something wet on his cheek, and looked up. A snowflake, big and floating lazily down, had struck him.

Others followed it, and soon there were myriads of big, wet snowflakes falling slowly through the air.

The cattle began to hurry, and were lowing in a distressing way. Their instinct told them to seek shelter, and they were telling their drovers as much in their own fashion.

For a half-hour the snow continued to come down, wet and soft.

But suddenly the wind changed in temperature. Before it had been raw and damp. Now it became sharp and frosty.

The snow changed quickly from heavy, wet flakes, to small, dry, sharp particles, which, driven by a strong wind, which had veered around into the north, stung the faces of the boys like needles, and worried the cattle, which seemed to want to lag in their pace.

"Kit, go back and tell the boys to keep pushing harder. The cattle want to stop, and if they quit now it's all up. There's a blizzard coming. If we can keep them at it an hour longer we will be in the lee of the buttes, and there's a deep coulee into which we can drive and hold them until morning."

At Ted's command Kit dashed toward the rear, and repeated the order, and the cow-punchers rode into the herd with shouts and with active lashing of their quirts, and the beasts picked up their pace again and hurried

forward through the snow, which had begun to whiten the ground.

Kit returned to Ted's side.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"If we had an hour more of daylight I think we could make it," said Ted.

"Any doubt of it?"

"Well, when it becomes dark we'll lose sight of Long Tom, and we're likely to drift, because, unless the cattle are driven into the storm, they'll turn tail to it and go the other way."

"I can't see Long Tom now."

"I can, although the snow almost blots it out. There it is right in the northwest. I can just make it out. The herd is drifting south of it now. Better get over on your point, and head them up this way a bit."

Soon the herd was driving forward in the right direction again.

But suddenly the darkness came down like a pall of black smoke, shutting out everything, and the wind increased in violence, rising with a howl and a shriek like some enormous and terrible animal in rage.

"It's all off," said Ted to himself, with a sigh.

The cattle came to a stop.

"Keep them going!" shouted Ted, riding back frantically along the line.

The cow-punchers dashed among the animals, shouting and beating them with their quirts, and managed to get them started again, but it was only for a short time, for again they stopped, bellowing, the leaders milling and throwing everything into confusion.

"That settles it," shouted Ted to Bud. "They're going to drift all night if we don't stop them."

"Dern ther luck, I says," growled Bud. "How fur air we from ther ranch?"

"The worst of it is we're right on it. The ranch-house isn't more than three miles from here, and if we could have got there we would have been all right. By morning we may be ten miles away, if we let the herd drift, and we'll have a dickens of a time getting the brutes back through the snow."

"What air we goin' ter do with the wimmin folks?"

"I'm going to try to get them to the ranch-house. You boys will have to make a snow-camp, and hold the herd from drifting at all odds. Don't let them sneak on you. Keep pushing them from the south. You see they're all turned that way now with their tails to the wind. As soon as they get cold they will begin to move. Don't let 'em do it."

"All right, Ted. We'll do the best we can. You take care o' ther wimmin folks. So long, an' good luck."

Ted rode back to where Mrs. Graham was shivering in the closed wagon the boys had provided for her, and Stella was sitting her pony by her side, trying to encourage her.

Carl Schwartz was the Jehu of the outfit, and sat on the driver's seat, a fair imitation of a snow-man.

"Carl, get a move on you. We're going to try to make the Long Tom ranch-house," said Ted. "I'll lead, and you follow. If you lose sight of me, yell to me and I'll come back. I've got my pocket search-light, and will send you back a flash now and then."

Carl was half-frozen and would have been pleased to get down and walk the rest of the distance, but he knew the danger that surrounded them, and simply yelled back "Yah!" and gathered up the reins for a start.

"Come on, Stella," said Ted. "We're going to try to make the ranch-house."

Without a word Stella followed him, and the little caravan struck into the teeth of the snow-laden wind, which was now blowing half a gale.

The wagon moved slowly through the snow, which was getting deeper every minute, and was like heavy sand.

Every few minutes Carl's voice could be heard, and Ted called back to him.

Ted was traveling entirely by instinct, for it was so dark that he could not see a foot in front of them.

So they struggled on for an hour, halting occasionally to give the horses a breathing-spell, then drove obstinately forward again.

"We should have been at the ranch-house long ago," shouted Ted at last, pulling in his panting horse.

"Then we're lost, I suppose," shouted Stella in return.

"Looks that way."

"What are you going to do?"

"Stop for the rest of the night."

"I wouldn't. Keep on until the horses won't go any farther."

"All right, if you think best."

On they went again for a half-hour more, and Ted was beginning to believe it was folly to go any farther when his pony stumbled and almost fell.

In front of them loomed a darkness more intense than before.

Ted scrambled from the back of his pony and led it forward. The pony had stumbled over the horse-block at the very door of the Long Tom ranch-house.

CHAPTER II.

THE LONG TOM RANCH.

Ted and Stella raised such a shout that Carl pulled his horses up just in time to keep them from trying to climb upon the veranda.

With the aid of his search-light Ted had found the door and entered the house, followed by Stella.

In the big front living-room they found a lamp, which they lighted and looked around.

The house had been left ready for occupancy, and in the great wide fireplace, logs were piled high ready to be burned.

In a moment Ted had a fire leaping high up the chimney, then hastened out to the carriage.

Carl had scrambled down from the seat of the carriage, and was so cold and numb that he couldn't walk, while Mrs. Graham had to be carried into the house by Ted and placed before the fire to thaw out.

Soon the room was comfortable, and Ted, who had set out on a tour of inspection, found that the kitchen was well stored with food.

He started a fire, and soon had coffee and bacon cooking.

Outside the storm continued to rage through the night, but all within was tight and warm, and Stella and her aunt retired to their comfortable bedrooms. But Ted sat up through the night.

He had considered starting back through the storm to the herd, but thought better of it, for Bud was perfectly capable of doing all that could be done with the cattle until daylight came to their rescue.

While daylight was struggling up through the leaden eastern sky the wind died down as suddenly as it had risen, and the snow ceased falling.

Ted had fallen into a doze in a chair in front of the fire, but a stray sunbeam coming through a window fell upon his closed eyelids, and he awoke with a start. For a minute he could not think where he was. Then the cheery voice of Stella fell upon his ears. Somewhere in the distance she was singing, and he sprang to his feet and looked about him.

It came to him that he was at the Long Tom, and he remembered having left the Circle S herd out in the blizzard.

This stirred him to action, and he went back to the kitchen with the intention of lighting the fire and getting breakfast.

He stopped in the doorway in astonishment. Stella, with her sleeves rolled to the elbows, was busily engaged at the stove, singing as she worked.

"Good morning," said Ted. "You beat me to it. Why didn't you wake me up and put me to work?"

"Hello!" said Stella cheerily. "You looked so tired sitting in that chair that I thought I'd let you sleep. At any rate, cooking breakfast is no work for a boy in a house. Get ready. Breakfast will be on the table in a minute. What do you think I found in the shed behind the house? A mountain-sheep already dressed, and hung up for us. The fellow who left this house for us certainly was a good one. He knew we'd come in hungry, and left everything ready for us."

"That was just like Fred Sturgis. He's one of the best fellows in the world. He's the owner of the ranch. Young New York fellow. Wanted to spend the winter in the East. That's how I was able to get the ranch. But I'll bet he'll be back here before the snow melts. You couldn't keep him off the range for any length of time."

"He certainly has good taste. The house is almost as nice as the Moon Valley house, but nothing is quite as nice as that."

Mrs. Graham and Carl were roused, and they were soon sitting down to chops from a mountain-sheep and corn-bread which Stella had made, and they all voted that winter life in Montana promised to be a very jolly thing.

When Ted went outdoors the whole world was simply a glittering waste where the sun shone on, and was reflected back from the vast field of snow.

Sultan was in the sheltered corral, and as Ted threw the saddle on his back he reared and jumped about like a playful kitten.

"Quit your cavorting about, you rascal," said Ted, as Sultan wheeled away from the saddle with a playful snort, at the same time reaching around and trying to nip Ted's shoulder with his teeth.

"My, but you're feeling gay this morning," said Ted. "Here, hold still, won't you? How do you suppose I'm ever going to get this saddle on you if you don't stand still?"

But the cold weather and the bright sunshine had filled Sultan with ginger, and he was as full of play as a small boy when he wakes up some early winter morning and sees the ground covered with the first snow, and remembers the sled that has laid in the wood-shed all summer.

But at last the saddle was on, and then Ted had his hands full getting into it.

"Gee, but you're skittish this morning," said Ted, giv-

ing Sultan a vigorous slap on the haunch. "But just you wait a few minutes until I get on you. I'll take some of that out of you."

But when he tried to find the stirrup with his toe, Sultan wheeled away from him with a little kick that was as dainty as that of a professional dancer.

But at last Ted made a leap and landed safely upon Sultan's back, and gave him a slap with the loose end of his rein. The little horse gave a leap like a kangaroo, and dashed through the gateway of the corral and across the white prairie, running like a quarter-horse.

The herd was nowhere in sight, but in the far distance Ted saw a thin blue stream of smoke rising in the still, frosty air.

He knew it to be the camp-fire of McCall, and that breakfast was going forward at the cow-camp in the snow.

Heading Sultan toward it, Ted rushed on through the stimulating air of a northern winter, and soon came in sight of the chuck-wagon, and several of the boys standing around a fire.

As he dashed forward he raised the long yell, which was gleefully answered, and soon he was at the camp.

This was where he and Stella had started from the night before.

Turning his eyes back in the direction he had come, Ted could see the smoke rising from the chimney of the ranch-house, although the house itself was hidden behind a swell in the surface of the prairie.

Had he only known it, he might have driven the herd right up to the ranch-house during the night. As it was, he saw now that he and Stella, with the carriage, had ridden for almost two hours in the night, traveling in a circle, and by the merest chance had stumbled upon the ranch-house.

"Hello, fellows!" he shouted as he rode up, "where are the dogies?"

"Oh, to blazes and gone!" exclaimed big Ben, who was trying to thaw out his boots at the fire.

"Where?" asked Ted anxiously.

"Away off yonder." Ben pointed disconsolately toward the south.

"Are they all right?"

"All right, nothing. They're up to their bellies in snow in a coulée, and won't stir. They're the sickest-looking lot of beef critters you ever saw. We've been working with them ever since daylight, then Bud sent us along to thaw out and get some chuck into us, and hurry back so that the other fellows could get limbered up some. Find the house?"

"Yes, accidentally stumbled on to it. Bully place, and the women folks are comfortable settled."

"Looks like it," grunted Ben, pointing to the north.

Ted looked in that direction and saw a spotted pony leaping toward them, and above it a dash of scarlet. It was Stella, riding like the wind on Magpie.

"Have any trouble with the critters in the night?" asked Ted.

"Did we? Well, I should howl. After you got under way they began to drift before the wind. We fought them all night, and if we'd let them go they'd been plumb into Colorado by this time. I don't want any more such nights in mine."

"That was only a starter, my friend. That was a picnic compared to what you may have to go up against before the daisies bloom again."

"Chuck!" yelled McCall, beating on the bottom of a griddle with a big iron spoon.

The fellows left the fire in a hurry and, squatting in the snow with a tin cup full of steaming coffee and a plate heaped with fried bacon and griddle-cakes, were soon too busy to remember their weariness.

Stella had ridden up, her cheeks glowing, and her eyes sparkling with the frost and the exercise.

"Why didn't you wait for me?" she cried to Ted. "You're a mean thing. Thought you'd leave me behind, but here I am." She made a little face at Ted.

"I thought you'd rather stay indoors to-day on account of the cold," stammered Ted.

"Well, change your line of thought. There's going to be nothing to keep me indoors in this country, and don't you forget it. If I've got to stay indoors I'll go South."

As soon as the boys had finished breakfast they were ready for another day's work.

"Come on, fellows," shouted Ted. "Let's hurry to where the critters are, and send the other boys back. Mac, cook up another breakfast for them."

They were in the saddle in a jiffy, and scurrying toward the south as fast as their ponies could carry them.

Ted found the herd bogged in a shallow coulée that was filled to the top with snow, in which they stood up to their bellies, lowing from fright, hunger and thirst.

They were packed in a solid mass, and could not get out on the other side because the wall of the coulée was too steep for them to clamber up, as they might have done had it not been for the deep snow with which it was drifted full.

As a matter of fact, though, the coulée had saved the herd from drifting many miles in the night.

But how to get them out was the question that perplexed Bud, and with the arrival of Ted he thankfully turned the task over to him.

"Hike for the chuck-wagon, boys," shouted Ted, as he came up.

"Well, I should smile to ejaculate," said Bud, "we're as hollow an' cold as a rifle-bar'l. I'll turn this leetle summer matinée over ter you, my friend, not wishin' you any harm."

"Go ahead and enjoy yourselves," said Ted. "But as soon as you have filled up and warmed up come back. As soon as we get the bunch out of this hole it will be a snap to get them near the ranch-house. If we'd only known it we could have made it in half an hour more last night."

When Bud had ridden away Ted took stock of the situation, and found that he had a difficult problem to solve.

Under ordinary circumstances it would have been easy to snake the cattle out of the coulée by roping them around the horns and dragging them out with the ponies, but it was utterly impossible to do that with a couple of thousand of them.

While he was looking things over he became aware that Stella had ridden away. He looked anxiously after her, for he knew her propensity for getting into trouble when she rode alone. Soon she dropped out of sight behind a swell in the prairie with a flash in the sunlight of her scarlet jacket.

Ted was still studying the situation, riding up and down the edge of the coulée, trying to figure out some plan of rescue, and noting the cattle that were down,

and which were rapidly being trampled to death by the other beasts, or being smothered by the snow.

The prospect was not a pleasing one to the young cow-boss, for he saw the profits of the venture fading away hourly.

Suddenly a faint, shrill yell reached his ears, and he wheeled his pony in the direction from which it came.

Stella's scarlet jacket was coming toward him in a whirlwind of flying snow, and he rushed toward her.

What could have happened to her? He looked in vain for whatever was pursuing her, and saw that she was not being followed, but was swinging her arm above her head with a triumphant gesture.

He slowed his pony down, and soon she dashed to his side.

"You fellows are certainly a bright lot of cow-punchers," she exclaimed.

"What's the matter now?" asked Ted gloomily.

"Didn't any of you think of scouting down the coulée?"

"I confess I didn't."

"You ought to be laid off the job for a week."

"Why?"

"You can get those cattle out of that hole in an hour."

"We can! How do you know?"

"The coulée runs out about a mile to the west, and straight to the north, up a wide swale, lies the ranch-house in full view."

"Stella, you're all right. But the cattle are bogged, and they can't move even down the coulée."

"I believe they can."

"How?"

"When the other boys come back from breakfast all of you jump into the coulée and tramp the snow down as much as you can ahead of the leaders. Then start them up."

"Bully for you, Stella; you're a better cow-puncher than any of us."

"No, I'm not, but because I don't know as much about it. I go at it in a woman's way, which is a roundabout way, and nearly always foolish to look at, but sometimes does the work."

This suggestion had the effect of taking a great load from Ted's shoulders, for if he did not succeed in getting the herd out before night they would freeze solid in their molds of snow, and then he would never get half of them out alive.

Presently Bud and the other boys came winging back from breakfast, and Ted told them of the plan for releasing the cattle, at the same time praising Stella and giving her all the credit for the idea.

"Peevish peppers, but I'm a tenderfoot," grunted Bud. "Why in Sam Hill didn't I think o' that myself? I reckon I'm gettin' too old fer ther cow business. I ought ter be milkin' cows at some dairy-farm."

The boys followed Stella's suggestion, and, leaping into the coulée, wheeled their ponies about until they had a well-beaten road for several hundred feet toward the west.

Then, cutting out a bunch of about fifty steers, led by a wise old fellow, the herd-leader, whom they called Baldy on account of the spot of white hair between his horns, drove them along the path. After getting the bunch going well, the boys drove them with yells and the lashing of quirts into the deep snow ahead, and would not let them stop.

Another bunch was driven up, and soon there was a smooth road along the bottom of the coulée to the open ground, over which the cattle passed to safety.

Stella's good common sense had saved the herd.

CHAPTER III.

THE SIGN-CAMP GHOST.

As the last of the herd came out of the coulée to the open ground, a cheer went up for Stella, who blushed rosy-red, and told the boys to hush.

Then the drive to the big pasture began, word having been sent to McCall to follow with the chuck-wagon.

The big pasture ran north from the home pasture, which was near the ranch-house.

It comprised thousands of acres, and was so high that nearly always it was free of snow, which the strong winds coming down from the mountains swept as clear as if a gigantic broom had been used.

Back of the pasture lay a range of low mountains, the Sweet Grass, they were called, in which several high buttes towered like sentinels.

The Sweet Grass Mountains had the reputation of harboring a great many "bad men," both whites and Indians, who had forsaken the Blackfeet Indian reservation to the west.

The mountain valleys afforded a splendid protection for the cattle, as did the numerous coulées with which the country was seamed.

The big pasture of the Long Tom was reputed to be the best winter feeding-ground in Montana. The grass was high and nutritious, and there were plenty of water-holes.

Once on the pasture the cattle scattered into smaller herds, each under the leadership of a bull, while the steers drifted off by themselves.

All that was necessary to care for the herd was to ride the lines of the pasture, and keep the cattle on their own feeding-grounds, prevent them from straying, and hunt down the packs of wolves which preyed upon the weak cows and young cattle.

At stated intervals along the lines of the pasture were cabins, known as "sign-camps," in which the line-riders lived.

The first sign-camp out of the home pasture was eight miles distant, and the next was under the lee of the mountains, on the west line.

As Ted directed the drive of the herd to the big pasture, on the south and west line of which the first sign-camp was situated, he cut out part of the herd and held it back, while the remainder of the cattle went forward.

At the first sign-camp Bud and Carl were dropped, for they were to ride the line to the north and east from that point.

Bud was glad to get some rest, and with a wave of the hand went on his way to the camp to await the arrival of Carl, who had ridden back to the ranch-house for his blankets and other supplies.

During the day the chuck-wagon, following the instructions of Ted, stopped at the sign-camp, and left a supply of provisions and Bud's blankets.

Bud looked out the window of the cabin, and saw that the herd was grazing quietly, for the cattle were very hungry, and as they were safe for the time being, he

rolled himself in his blankets and was soon sleeping soundly.

He awoke on hearing a fumbling at the door, and sat up.

It was pitch-dark, and he had slept nearly all day.

Unlimbering his six-shooter, he called, "Who's thar?"

"Ach, Pud, it's me alretty," came the muffled reply.

"So it's you, Carl. Why don't you come in?"

"Der door open, Pud, please. I my arrums full mit dings have."

Bud sprang from his blankets and threw the door open, admitting a cold blast and a flurry of snow.

"Ugh!" he ejaculated, with a shudder. "Come in, yer fat wad o' Dutch. What yer waitin' fer?"

"Someding has my hat stolen off mit my head." Carl's voice expressed both perplexity and awe.

Evidently something unusual had happened, and Bud put on his hat and stepped outside.

He had no sooner passed through the doorway than his own hat was snatched from his head.

He drew his revolver, leaped into the open, and looked about him.

There was no one in sight except Carl, who was standing near him with his arms full of blankets and bundles.

Carl could not have played the trick on him, and there was not wind enough to have blown the hat away. Anyhow, it had been snatched from his head by a hand and not by the wind.

There was something uncanny about this.

It was still light enough to see out in the open, and the snow-covered ground reflected light enough to have discovered an intruder had one been there.

Bud ran around the house, but could find no person, and there were no tracks of a man's foot in the snow.

"Jumpin' sand-hills, but that's queer," said Bud, coming back to where Carl was still standing in the snow before the door, staring about in a bewildered way. "Gosh ding yer, Carl, I believe yer swiped my hat, an' if yer don't give it up I'll plant my toe whar it'll be felt onpleasantly."

"Honest, Pud, I ain't your hat taking," said Carl, distressfully. "Vhy, I my hat losing too, yet."

"That's so, an' yer loaded down with truck. Throw them things inter ther house an' help me hunt ther thief. Don' be standin' thar like a sausage."

"Don'd you calling me a sissage," said Carl wrathfully. "I ain't feeling mooch as having fun mit you now. I bring all dese dings mit der saddle on, und I lose two or three every dime der pony makes his jumpings, und get down kvick to pick dem up maype as fifty dimes."

"Oh, all right. Quit yer belly-achin', an' come an' help. We can't get along without hats. That's a cinch."

Carl retired into the house with his bundles.

"Wow! Stop it, cuss ye," yelled Bud, as Carl came out of the cabin.

"I ain't didding noding," said Carl, backing away as Bud rushed upon him.

"Yer did, yer fat galoot. Yer pulled my hair most out by ther roots."

"I ain't pulling no hairs," Carl persisted.

"Then who done it? Yer ther only person what I can see. It's a cinch some one pulled my hair."

"Say, Pud."

"What?"

"Let us camp outside."

"What, an' freeze ter death before mornin'? Nixy. Not fer me."

"Ain't you heard about der shack?"

"No, I ain't, an' I don't want ter. What I'm after now is ther galoot what got our hats an' pulled my hair."

"Ain't you heard about der ghost?"

"Ghost!"

Bud was staring at Carl with his jaw dropped.

"Yah. Dis is a ghost haus, filled mit ghostesses."

"Don't you go making any monkey talks at me. There ain't no sich things as ghosts. That'll do fer ter frighten kids with, but not fer me."

"Den who tooken our hats, und who your golden locks pulled?"

"That's so. Who took them? Tell me, who put all thet dope about this bein' a haunted house in ther shell what yer calls yer head?"

"Bill Simms, der cow-puncher vot we picked up on der drive, informationed me about it. He says a man was kilt in dis shack, und dot he valks aroundt mit it ven der night cooms."

"That Bill Simms is ther worst liar in forty States. He tried ter fill me with wild dreams about a feller what rides ther line on this yere ranch what can stand havin' ther contents o' a six-shooter pumped inter him, an' it don't faze him none."

"Yah. Dot's der ghostes vot runs dis shack. I don'd vant ter stay here, Pud. Please let us camp out in der snow."

"Why, yer doodle, can't ther ghost come out yere jest ez easy ez he kin' go inter ther house—that is, if he's a sure enough ghost?"

"Yah, I guess he can. Vat vill ve didding?"

"I don't care what you do, but I'm goin' inter ther shack ter start up ther fire an' get warm. I don't care what you do, but I'm most froze."

"Don't leaf me alone, dear Pud. Please, I imploring you."

"Come on, then."

Bud stepped inside, and as he did so he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

Both the purloined hats lay in the middle of the floor.

"There, didn't I told you?" exclaimed Carl, in an awed voice.

Bud simply stared at the hats.

"Nopody but a ghostes could haf did dat."

Bud looked around the room, and then up at the ceiling. Then he burst into a roar of laughter.

"Thar's ther ghost," he shouted, grasping Carl by the arm and twisting him around so that he could see.

In the corner just below the ceiling were two sharp, green points of light that glowed in the faint radiance cast by the fire, which had sunk to embers.

"Ach, mutter, save your liddle Carl. It vor der ghostes."

"That ain't no ghost," said Bud scornfully. "Ain't you never hear tell how ghosts look? They're all white an' long an' skinny, an' when they walk they carry chains what clanks, an'——"

"Oh, Pud, stop. Don't say it some more. My plood vas chilling now so I ain't aple to swallow in my troat alretty. I vas so scared as nefer vas I."

"Yer a cheerful roommate, I must say. See, ther ghost is gone."

"I ain't nefer goin' ter be happy some more. I haf seen a ghost. I vill die, I am sure."

"Yer kin bet on that ez a shore thing, an' I reckon I will, too."

"Listen!" Carl grasped Bud by the arm with the clutch of despair.

There was a faint and stealthy noise on the roof.

Both stood for a few moments listening breathlessly.

Then they heard a faint, far-away wail, like that of a banshee.

Carl threw his arms around Bud in an agony of fear.

"Dere it iss. Ve are gone. All iss lost."

Again the gruesome wail came to them, this time louder and clearer, and in a moment or two a hand was at the door. The latch clicked softly, and the door swung slowly open.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BIG COON TREE.

"Hello, what's the matter with you fellows? Are you going to have a waltz, or is it going to be a two-step, or a catch-as-catch-can wrestling match? Perhaps you've suddenly grown very fond of one another."

It was Ted who spoke, standing in the doorway, laughing as if he would burst his buttons off, at the strange tableau in the middle of the floor, Carl clinging to Bud, who was trying to shake him off.

"Let loose o' me," shouted Bud. "Why, ther feller's plumb daffy on ghosts. He says as how this shack is haunted, an' he's plumb loco."

"Yah. Didn't we just hear der ghostes yell mit der outside?" said Carl, who had been thrust away from his clutch on Bud, and was standing in the middle of the floor, trembling like one with the ague.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Ted. "Ghost, eh? It was me calling to the cattle, and sending them back from the line."

"Yah, aber I seen mit mine own eyes der green ones oof der ghost up in dot corner, und heart him on der roof."

"Come outside, and I'll show you the footprints of the ghost," said Ted, leading the way.

Out in the snow by the side of the cabin Ted showed them several tracks, something like a small hand, which ended at the wall of the cabin.

"That's where the ghost went up," said Ted. "Let's climb the wall, and see what is on the roof."

It was easy climbing up the log-wall, for there were plenty of footholds.

When they were high enough to look over the edge of the roof, Bud gave an exclamation of surprise, and then burst out laughing, in which Ted joined.

But Carl could not see the joke.

"It's a vildcat," he shouted, scrambling to the ground.

"It ain't, neither," asseverated Bud. "It's a bully little ole pet coon. That's what it is."

He held out his hand, and the coon, making a queer little chuckling noise, came slowly toward him as he held out his finger, which the sharp-eyed little beast clasped in its fingerlike paw and pulled.

Bud reached out, tucked it under his arm, and climbed down with it.

"This yere coon was a pet ter ther fellers what rid line yere before," said Bud, when they were in the cabin again. "He's been hangin' eround ever since, an' when he saw us he thought it wuz his ole pardners come back. He's been taught ter swipe hats an' drop 'em down inter

ther house through ther chimbley-hole. That accounts fer it, an' I reckon he's ther whole ghost."

"Yah, mebbe I dinks so," said Carl, who looked rather sheepish at his exhibition of fear.

"He's a smart little piece," said Ted. "By the way, Carl, get busy with the pots and pans. I'm going to stay to supper and sleep here to-night. I've got the cattle and the boys planted, and it is too far to go on to the ranch-house to-night. Stella and Kit went back an hour ago."

Carl went to work to cook supper, while Bud played with the coon, which was as full of tricks as a monkey, and kept the boys laughing all the time.

"A coon is a mighty smart animile," said Bud, as they sat down to supper.

"So I've heard," said Ted. "But I've never seen many of them."

"Dere is no such beast in Chermany," Carl put in proudly.

"That's so," said Bud. "Ameriky is the land o' ther free, an' ther home o' ther coon. Never went coon-huntin', did yer, Ted?"

"I never did."

"Well, ye've missed some mighty good fun. Down in Missouri is whar ther coon grows wild an' independent, an' ther ain't one o' them what's come o' age what ain't as smart as ary Congressman you ever see."

"I've heard something about coon-hunting," said Ted.

"It's great down in Missouri. Thar's whar ther coon trees grow."

"Vat such foolishment fer?" said Carl, with a sneer. "Coons don't grow mit trees on."

"Nobody said they could, but they live in trees, yer loony. A ole gum-tree what's holler is ther home o' ther coon. Thar's whar ther best coon-dogs come from, too. Ever hunt coons with a dog?" continued Bud.

"Never did," said Ted. "It seems too picayunish fer me. I like bigger game than that. Besides, I don't care much fer hunting in the night-time."

"Do they hunt mit der coons in der night-time?" asked Carl, who was beginning to be interested.

"Shore! That's ther time ter tree 'em. My Uncle Fletcher out in ole Missou, we ust ter call him Ole Unc' Fletch, had four or five coon-dogs that was ther cream o' the coon-huntin' canines in several counties, an' Unc' Fletch was out near every night chasin' coons."

"Many of them there?" asked Ted.

"Ther country was overrun with 'em. They ust ter eat all ther roastin' ears o' corn in ther bottom-lands, an' git away with more chickens than ever those that raised 'em did, until it got so that ther farmers said they was only raisin' corn an' chickens ter keep ther coons fat."

"No money in that."

"Not much. But I wuz goin' ter tell yer what happened ter Unc' Fletch one night ter show how plenty coons wuz in his section."

"One night he starts out with his best coon-dog, Ballyhoo, so called because he made sech a noise when he treed a coon."

"Ballyhoo runs acrost ther scent o' a coon an' takes after it. Unc' Fletch trails along, an' Ballyhoo stops at a big sycamore-tree. But there don't seem ter be no hole, an' after Unc' looks around, an' can't find nothin', he calls Ballyhoo off, an' they start through ther woods ag'in."

"Pretty soon Ballyhoo scents another coon, an', by

jing, it leads them ter ther same sycamore. About twenty times that night they strikes ther scent, an' every time it stops at the same tree.

"Now Unc' Fletch wuz some o' a woodman, an' he says it ain't nat'ral fer ther dog ter tree so many coons at ther same place, an' wonders if thar is somethin' wrong with ther dog, if he's gone daffy, er whether it's jest an onusual smart coon what has gone out jest ter have a joke by runnin' them ter ther same tree every time."

"While he is contemplatin' thus he is leanin' with his back ter ther tree. Pritty soon he thinks he'll go home, an' he starts away sorter disgustedlike with ther night's sport, an', by gee, he finds he's caught by ther tail o' his coat an' can't break loose."

"He tries ter get away, but he's shore fast. He reaches around, an' ther tree hez got hold o' him all right, an' bein' some superstitious, Unc' Fletch begins ter git some scared. Then he ricollects about hearin' the colored folks talk about the haunted coon tree."

"Coons is ghostes, not?" asked Carl.

"Wait an' you'll hear," continued Bud. "'Long about this time, Ballyhoo begins ter howl in ther most sad an' lonesome way, an' that don't make Unc' Fletch feel any better. Jest as he's thinkin' about hollerin' fer help—"

"Why didn't he skin out of his coat, and leave it stickin' to the tree?" asked Ted.

"I ast him ther same question, an' he says as how he was too plumb scared ter do sich a thing. But jest as he was goin' ter holler he finds that he's loose, an' all his spunk comes back again."

"Then he begun ter be curious ter find out what it was that held him fast. He lights a fire an' gets a torch ter examine ther tree, but can't find nothin' that would hev cotched him thataway."

"But as he's lookin' ther strangest thing happens. Ther tree opens a crack runnin' all ther way from ther roots up as far as Unc' Fletch kin see. Ther crack is big ernuff ter put yer finger in, but Unc' Fletch doesn't do no such fool trick ez that."

"In less than a minnit ther crack closes up ag'in, an' thar ain't no sign o' it. Now this is some puzzlin' ter Unc' Fletch, an' he hez some more o' them funny feelin's erbout ghosts, an' them things."

"While he's still watchin' ther tree, ther crack opens again, then closes an' opens an' closes, same as if it wuz breathin'. This makes Unc' Fletch some riled, fer he wa'n't never a feller what can stand bein' made a joke of, an' he thinks ther ghost in ther tree is havin' fun with him."

"What did he do?" asked Ted, when Bud stopped and looked reflectively into the fire.

"Well, he starts out ter make a fool out o' ther ghost, if it is a ghost, er outer ther tree, if it is jest a tree what is triflin' with him."

"He has his ax with him, fer every real coon-hunter always carries an ax ter chop down ther tree when he finds a coon in it. But he, wa'n't goin' ter chop down this tree none."

"What did he want with the ax, then?"

"I'll soon tell yer. First he chops down a small tree, an' he makes a wedge with an edge erbout ther size o' yer little finger, an' he waits until ther tree breathes ergin. Then he slips ther wedge in, an' hammers it home."

"Ha, ha!" says he ter ther tree, 'ye'll make monkey-shines with me, holdin' me by ther coat-tails, will yer?"

An' all ther time he is choppin' out another wedge, bigger than ther first.

"As he keeps choppin' out, an' shovin' bigger an' bigger wedges inter ther crack, he hears noises comin' from ther tree like what he ain't never heard before. But ther tree is beginnin' ter give out crackin' noises, too, like as if it was splittin'.

"While this is goin' on Ballyhoo is makin' a terrible fuss, an' jest tryin' ter tear ther tree down with his claws. At last ther tree busts plumb open, an' what d'yer think Unc' Fletch sees?"

Neither Ted nor Carl replied. What the tree contained was a thing unguessable, but Carl's eyes were as big as saucers as he stared at Bud, awaiting the solution of the mystery.

"What did it contain?" asked Ted at last.

"It was plumb full o' coons," said Bud solemnly. "Thar must 'a' been two hundred coons in that tree. It was a regular coon-hotel. They made it a sort o' winter colony. Every coon fer miles around made it home."

"But that doesn't explain the crack in the tree and the strange way in which it opened and closed."

"That's easy now that yer knows that the tree was holler an' plumb full o' coons."

"I don't see it yet."

"Why, it wuz like this. Every time them coons drew a long breath it expanded ther tree so that it opened a crack, an' when their lungs filled the crack opened wide. Then, when they let out thar breath ag'in, ther crack closed tight ag'in. Unc' Fletch happened ter lean up ag'in ther tree jest ez ther crack closed, an' that's how his coattails got caught."

"And what became of all those coons?" asked Ted.

"Yer see they got inter ther tree through a hole in ther top. Unc' Fletch didn't dare leave ther tree alone, so he tied a note ter Ballyhoo an' sent him back ter ther village fer a carpenter. When ther carpenter come they put a roof on ther tree an' made a door at ther bottom, an' let ther coons out one at a time. By this means they got every dodgasted coon in them woods, an' Unc' Fletch's bounties was enough ter enable ter lift ther mortgage on ther farm."

"I guess that will do for to-night," said Ted, laughing. "I'm going to hit the blankets, for it's up at daylight for all of us. I only hope your pet coon does not attract so many others as to turn this sign-camp into a coon-hotel."

CHAPTER V.

THE PHANTOM LINE--RIDER.

For several days the weather remained fine, and the cattle were able to get accustomed to their new range and become hardened.

The boys at the sign-camps took things easy. In each sign-camp were two boys, one of whom rode days, and the other nights, when it was necessary in bad weather to hold the cattle from drifting.

In order to keep in touch with one another the riders started from their camps and met midway between, in order to exchange notes as to the condition of the cattle and other things necessary to the welfare of the whole herd.

There was another reason for this constant interchange of communication between the camps.

Ted had received a warning from the town of Bubbly Creek, a small cattle-station, about twenty miles from the Long Tom Ranch, where there was a cattleman's hotel, a few saloons, and an outfitting store, to look out for the Whipple gang, which had its rendezvous in the Sweet Grass Mountains.

Fred Sturgis, in the last letter Ted had received from him, had also mentioned this gang of thieves and desperadoes, whose operations extended from Canada, into which they made extensive raids when the Canadian Mounted Police happened to be out of that part of the country, as far south as the central portion of Montana.

"I have had considerable trouble with the Whipple gang myself," Sturgis wrote, "but as yet I have never seen but one member of the gang to know it. I have had plenty of cattle stolen, and have always attributed the thefts to the Whipples. All I know about the gang is that it was founded by a fellow named Whipple, an outlaw on the scout, who attracted to himself a desperate gang of fugitives from justice who had taken refuge in the Sweet Grass Mountains.

"I have never seen Whipple himself, but from those who claim to know him he is described as an enormous man of prodigious strength, and a perfect brute, who has forced his men into absolute subjection by his acts of brutality toward them.

"With Whipple are a number of bad Indians, who have fled from the various reservations in Montana after having committed all sorts of crimes, from theft to murder. It is said that these are more to be feared than the white men, for they are terribly cruel, and when they get a victim he is tortured with all the horrible rites of the true savage. They know that the moment they are caught that is the end for them, so that they are reckless to the verge of insanity.

"I tell you these things, believing that you already know what ranching in northern Montana means, and with every confidence in Ted Strong's ability to take care of himself, and meet conditions when they appear. All I can say is, go after them if they molest you. I and my boys fought them so successfully that they gave us a wide berth toward the end. But when they learn that new hands have taken hold of the Long Tom they may think that they can start their funny business again.

"Knowing your reputation, and the ability you have shown in the past in wiping out, or at least breaking up and scattering, bands of bad men, I leave the Long Tom in your hands with the hope that when I take it over again in the spring there will be no more Whipple gang, and that the Sweet Grass Mountains will be as safe as one's own dooryard.

"A word in your ear about the Sweet Grass Mountains. It is known to a few men in Montana, and a few others in various parts of the country, that somewhere in those mountains are rich mines of gold and copper, and at various times men have brought out beautiful and valuable specimens of sapphires and rubies in the rough, not knowing what they were, having picked them up solely because they were beautiful and unusual.

"If it were not for the Whipple gang the mountains would have been opened up to the prospectors long ago. Several prospectors, unheeding of the warnings, have gone in, but none have ever come out of the Sweet Grass Mountains.

"Whoever is at the head of the Whipple gang pos-

sesses more than the usual share of brains, courage, and luck. Keep your eye peeled, and good fortune to you."

This letter had been read to the boys one night in camp, and all were instructed to look out for strangers on the ranch and to inform themselves of the business of such.

One night Carl started from the sign-camp to ride north to meet the rider from Sign-Camp Number 2, which lay nearer the mountains.

The camp in which Bud and Carl were stationed was Camp Number 1.

The distance between the camps was about six miles, so that each rider had to go about three miles to meet.

The night was clear and cold, and the air fairly sparkled with the frost in the brilliant white moonlight. It was a glorious night, and Carl, in a leather coat lined with fleece, and with a fur-cap upon his head, and his feet in thick felts, started away from the camp on his ride.

There was no wind, but the temperature was very low.

To the north the Sweet Grass Mountains loomed, a black mass against the sky, while all about the world was carpeted with snow.

Carl had not progressed more than a mile from his camp when he saw a dark object against the snow some distance in front of him.

At first he thought it might be a bush or a rock, so still it was in the moonlight.

But he could not remember of ever having seen either a rock or a bush in that part of the range.

Then he wondered if he was late at the meeting-place, and that the other line-rider had got tired of waiting for him, and had ridden forward upon his line to meet him.

This stimulated him to greater speed, and he pricked up his pony.

But as he got nearer the black blot on the snow there seemed to be something unusual about it, and he unconsciously slowed his animal down to a walk.

At last he got within hailing distance, and saw that it was a man on horseback that he had been approaching.

The man on night duty at the second sign-camp was a cow-puncher named Follansbee, a short, reckless, yet amiable fellow, whom Carl knew well.

The rider who was awaiting him was an unusually large man, and bestrode an enormous horse. The two were as if they had been carved from ebony, as they stood silent and absolutely still, outlined sharply against the dazzlingly white background.

Something inside of Carl began to sink as he went on, slower and slower, his hand gripping the reins tightly, and holding back on them.

"Vot it is?" he was saying over and over to himself. "Vot it is? Dot is not Billy Follansbee. Dot man would mage dree times of Follansbee, nit?"

Cold fear was slowly stealing over Carl, and he wanted in his heart to turn and ride the other way.

But something seemed to draw him forward, and, try as he would, he could not bring himself to turn back.

The man on the black horse could not be a member of the Long Tom force, for Carl knew every one of them well, as a fellow will who has camped with them for months on a cattle-drive.

Now Carl was near enough to see the man's face, and he peered eagerly forward to get a glimpse of it.

Then his heart sank lower yet, for the man's face was as white as the snow beyond. There were no features;

neither nose, nor mouth, nor eyebrows, only a pair of black eyes gleamed out of that dead-white face.

Carl clutched at the horn of his saddle to keep from falling, he was so frightened.

"Vot it is?" he kept repeating to himself.

His pony stopped of its own volition directly in front of this black apparition, and Carl swayed in his saddle and would have fallen out of it had he not clung to it with the unconscious strength of despair.

"Iss dot you, Follansbee?" asked Carl, in a weak, thin voice, well knowing that it was not his line partner, but trying to break the spell of fear that held him.

There was no reply, but the gleaming black eyes never left his own, nor did the figure on the horse move a hair's breadth.

"Vy don't you say someding?" said Carl, his voice sounding like the piping noise of the wind through a keyhole. "Speak someding."

Then it suddenly struck Carl that the man could not speak, because in that white, immovable face there was no mouth to speak with, only those black, blazing eyes.

"If you can't speak, make motionings," said Carl, in an imploring voice.

The sinister figure on the black horse slowly raised his arm, and motioned Carl toward him, at the same time swinging his black horse around and riding toward the mountains.

Chilled to the heart, Carl obeyed the signal, and sent his pony forward.

The man, apparition, demon, or whatever it was, sent his horse into a gallop, and Carl, with no volition on his own part, followed at the same speed.

But with the black and menacing eyes of the man with the dead face away from his own, some small part of courage oozed back into Carl again, and he remembered Ted's injunction to question every stranger met on the range, and if he did not give a satisfactory answer to drive him off.

But Carl had not got over the fright the sight of that face and eyes had thrown him into.

Suddenly his hand came into contact with the handle of his six-shooter, and a thrill of daring ran through him.

He looked ahead at the back of the man riding only a few feet in advance of him.

Should he take the chance? He knew that Ted or Bud or any of the boys would do so. Why not he?

If the man was only human a bullet would soon settle the matter. But if he should be a ghost or an emissary of the devil, as Carl strongly suspected, nothing like a ball from a .45 would do him harm.

This had the effect of staying his hand, and the revolver stopped half-way out of its holster.

Then Carl thought of the boys, and what they would say if they knew that he had not nerve enough to pot the enemy when he met him.

Carl was not the bravest fellow in the world, and he was intensely superstitious.

Again the thoughts of the taunts of the other boys, should they ever know that he lacked the nerve to take advantage of the moment, came to him, and he gulped something hard that rose in his throat, and drew out his revolver.

At that moment the man in black turned and looked over his shoulder, his dead face gleaming white, out of which shone those terrible black eyes.

The revolver stopped suddenly in its upward course,

and Carl's jaw dropped as he stared in abject fear at that white and expressionless face.

Then the man in black turned his horrible face once more to the fore, and rode on.

Something inside of Carl seemed to snap, and a great glow of courage swept over him. He fairly hated the sight of the grim rider in front of him, who was taking him he knew not where, and whom he yet dreaded with all his heart.

Up came the revolver again, and, almost before he realized what he was doing, Carl was firing straight at the back in front of him.

The target could not be fairer, that black mark against the snow.

The first ball struck, for Carl heard the thud of it, as if it had struck and sunk into something soft.

The report of the weapon crashed through the still night, and was carried far on the frosty air, reverberating and echoing back from the distant mountains.

But the creature in whose body the ball had lodged did not seem to know it. The head was not turned, the body did not lurch or sway.

Carl, now blind to everything but the terror that had taken possession of him, fired again and again until every chamber in his revolver was empty, pausing after every shot to note the effect.

That every shot was fair he was sure, for he could hear the sound of the impact of the bullet.

The recipient of the bullets seemed not to know that they had been fired, for he did not hasten or retard the progress of the horse, nor did he take any personal notice that they gave him any discomfort.

But when Carl ceased firing he threw his head backward, looked over his shoulder again, and from that hideous face without nose or mouth came a gurgling noise that was like, and yet not like, laughter.

The laughter was worse on Carl's nerves than the silence, and he felt himself grow sick at heart.

How could he expect to fight or escape from a devil impervious to the balls from a Colt .45?

Then, to Carl's amazement and relief, the black horse sprang forward over the snow so swiftly that it seemed as if it was flying rather than running, but this probably was due to the uncertainty and the illusion of the moonlight, and vanished into thin air, leaving Carl staring open-mouthed.

It was several minutes before Carl regained his senses and knew that he was sitting with his revolver in his hand, staring into space and seeing nothing.

Then he rode slowly forward to the brink of a deep coulee.

Here was where he had last seen the phantom rider, for such Carl had at last come to regard him.

Looking to the bottom of the coulee, Carl saw nothing but snow, where he had expected to find a dead horse and rider.

"Ach, vot a country," he wailed. "Vy did I effer come to it? Mutter, I vish you vas here to hellup your Carlos."

Then he heard a groan close at hand and looked about, expecting to see the phantom rider by his side.

A short distance off lay a black splotch on the snow.

It resembled the prostrate form of a man. Had he, after all, killed his horrible enemy? Cautiously he rode toward it. It was a man, and not the phantom, and it looked very much like a cow-puncher, for it was clad in

leather coat and chaps, and there was a belt filled with cartridges, and in the snow beside it lay a Colt .45.

This at least was human, and Carl climbed stiffly from his saddle and bent over it.

He started back with a cry of surprise.

The man in the snow was his line partner, Follansbee.

That he was not dead was evident, for he groaned occasionally.

It was up to Carl to get him to camp as soon as he could, and when he tried to raise the insensible form he was stopped by a gush of blood from a wound in the breast.

But he heard a shot in the distance, then another, and another.

The boys had heard his shots, and were riding toward him with all speed.

Presently he heard the long yell, and in a few minutes Bud Morgan came dashing toward him at top speed, and soon they were joined by Kit Summers from Sign Camp Number 2, and the horror of the night was over for Carl.

CHAPTER VI.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

Follansbee was carried to Camp Number 2, where Bud, who was a pretty good cow-camp surgeon, examined his wound. A ball from an automatic revolver had struck him in the breast, but on account of the thickness of the clothing he wore, and the fact that he had on a heavy vest of caribou hide, in the pocket of which he carried a small memorandum-book, the ball had penetrated only a short distance.

While he had lost a lot of blood, and the shock of the ball striking had caused him to lose consciousness, he was not seriously hurt.

It did not take Bud long to extract the bullet and stanch the flow of blood, and Follansbee opened his eyes and looked about wildly.

"Where is he?" he cried in terror.

"Whar's who?" asked Bud.

"The man what didn't have no face," cried the cow-puncher.

"Carl chased him away alretty," said Carl, bending over his partner.

"All right, Carl. You saw him, too, did ye?"

"Sheur I sawed him, mit mine own eyes."

"Then it's all right," murmured Follansbee, sinking back on his bunk. "I wuz afeared the boys wouldn't believe me if I told them what I saw."

When Follansbee sank into a deep sleep, due to his weakness from loss of blood, the three boys sat before the fire while Carl told of his encounter with the faceless man, and of the six shots which he had fired at him and the ineffective bullets which had struck his body.

As the story was told a hush fell upon Bud and Kit. They were deeply affected by the fact that this unknown and terrible menace was upon the range which they were compelled to patrol, and which not even the balls from a heavy weapon could kill.

"I would hardly have believed it if both of you hadn't seen the creature," said Kit. "It sounds too much like a pipe-dream."

It was morning before Bud and Carl left Kit's camp and rode to their own. Follansbee was apparently all

right, and exhibited no symptoms of fever, for he had the iron constitution of a seasoned cow-puncher, who almost invariably recovers as if by magic from a gunshot wound if the missile does not penetrate a vital spot or splinter a bone.

Follansbee, when he awoke from his sleep, told Kit of his meeting with the "man without a face," as he called the man who had given him his wound.

"I wuz ridin' at a pretty good clip along the line to meet Carl," he began, "when I see a feller standin' waitin' for me by the deep coulee, about three mile south.

"At first I thought it wuz Carl, but soon I see that it wuz too big fer the Dutchman.

"I slowed down a bit, fer I saw it wasn't ary o' our outfit. Ye see I had in mind what Ted said about that Sweet Grass Mountain gang, an' I wuz some skittish.

"As I rode along slowly the feller on the black hoss made a sign as if he wanted me to foller him. But I didn't like the stunt, so I stops still an' rubbers at him.

"Two or three times he makes his motions, an' I don't do nothin' but shake my head.

"Kit, that wasn't no human bein'. It wuz ther devil as sure as shootin'. I started to draw my gun, but shucks, I ain't got no chanct ter make a move before thar was a crash, an' a blaze o' flame come from his chest, right about the middle, an' I felt the ball strike me. I heard a queer sorter laugh, like a man bubblin' with his mouth in a basin o' water, an' then I went out, an' all I remember wuz fallin' out o' the saddle."

About noon of that day, Ted and Stella rode over from the ranch-house on a tour of inspection, and stopped at Bud's camp, where they were told the story of Carl's strange encounter with the man without a face, to which he listened in troubled silence.

When Carl was through with his story, Ted looked for a long time into the fire without saying anything.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Stella, at last.

"I think it is the work of the Whipple gang," answered Ted.

"But why should they shoot Follansbee?"

"It is a piece of intimidation. Of course, they do not know us. Under ordinary circumstances an apparition like that, followed by the shooting of a man, would cause a panic among ignorant men on a ranch. It is a cinch that the Whipple gang has got it in for us, and this is just the beginning of it. You will soon see other evidences of their work."

"But why should they hev it in fer us?" asked Bud.

"We ain't never done nothin' ter them."

"I don't know, but I have several ideas."

"What are they?"

"There are two or three things to be considered. In the first place they have it in for the ranch on general principles. You know Fred Sturgis said in his letter that he and his boys had driven the gang away from the ranch. That is reason number one. Then we are strangers in this part of the country, and they have seen us and have us sized up for a lot of boys, and therefore easy marks for them. Again, we have a big bunch of cattle, which Whipple and his bunch think we will not be able to protect against them.

"They may have learned that we are deputy United States marshals. That is enough to condemn us in their eyes. They are all old and fugitive criminals, and if we knew them I think that we would find that they are all wanted in one or more of the States and Territories, and

that the aggregate amount of rewards which have been offered for them, dead or alive, would amount to a neat sum. They do not need marshals in this part of the country. There may be other reasons why they will make war on us, which we will learn later, but the ones I have mentioned are sufficient for them to make themselves very troublesome."

"So you think it is war, eh?" said Stella.

"I do, and I think that you will be a shining mark for them when they learn that you are here. For that reason I would warn you to be very careful where you go about the ranch, and especially ask you not to ride about alone, and to keep away from the mountains."

"Oh, dear, and just when I had planned to explore those mountains from one end to the other," said Stella, with a pout.

"Can't help it. You know what would happen if they should catch you and spirit you off as Shan Rhue did in the Wichita Mountains."

"Yes, I know, I'm a lot of trouble to you, Ted, but you know I don't mean to be."

"Of course I know it, but if you run into danger, and expose yourself to the attack of those who are avowedly our enemies, you run the chance of being caught, and then, of course, it is our duty to get you out of trouble."

"Well, I'll be good."

"The attempted killing of Follansbee was no accident," continued Ted. "It was the work of an exceedingly shrewd man, who knows the moral effect of his strange and mysterious appearance."

"Ain't it a ghost?" asked Carl, who had become all swelled up at the thought that he had made a ghost run away from him.

"I should say not."

"Den vy shouldn't mine bullets haf killed him?"

"I'm sure I don't know. That is why I say that he is a remarkably clever man, and it is probably the cause of the power he wields that he is able to do such things. It wouldn't surprise me any if some day we learned that your visitor was none other than the renowned Whipple himself."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Stella.

"What can we do? We wouldn't know a single member of the gang if we were to meet him. We don't know where they hang out, and if we did we know nothing about the Sweet Grass Mountains, and could not go to where they are. All we can do is to watch the ranch-house and the cattle as a cat watches a mouse, and if anything more, such as the shooting of Follansbee, occurs, we will have to go on the war-path ourselves. But I don't want to do that. We are out here to winter-feed our cattle, and not to fight."

"Shore enuff, but yer kin bet yer breeches I'm not goin' ter let no cave-dweller er brush-hider tromp onto my moccasins, an' turn ther other cheek ter be tromped on. Ther first feller o' that outfit I cotch sashayin' around me I'm goin' ter take a crack at him."

"Go as far as you like when it comes to an act of aggression on the part of one of them, but don't start anything, Bud, unless you can positively bring it to a successful end."

"I reckon I'm some of a fox myself. They ain't set no trap what I've put my paw inter yet."

Ted and Stella rode on to Kit's camp to see how Follansbee was getting on, and found him doing nicely, but Stella laughed at the bandages Bud had put on the

wounded cow-puncher, and insisted on redressing the wound.

Stella was a master-hand at bandaging, because she was deft of hand and was naturally sympathetic.

When she had finished with Follansbee, and had sewed his bandages so that he could not rub or drag them off, he said he felt a hundred per cent. better already.

Then they proceeded on toward the mountains where the third camp, under the direction of Ben Tremont, was situated.

It was almost the dying of the day when they left Ben's camp. He had not heard of the attack on Follansbee, and Ted made it an occasion to warn Ben against the attacks of the Whipple gang, as he was in the most exposed place, being so near the mountains.

When they turned their ponies' noses toward the south again it was to ride through a part of the herd.

Ted noticed that the cattle were feeding well and that there was plenty of good, rich, well-cured grass, and that it was free of snow in big enough patches to give the cattle ample room to graze.

As they were riding along Stella drew rein.

"What's the matter with that steer over there, Ted?" she asked, pointing to a steer that was dragging one of its hind legs.

Ted looked at the steer in question, which was moving slowly forward.

"See, there's another," cried Stella. "Why, I can see a dozen of them all limping in the same manner."

"That's strange," said Ted. "I wouldn't think anything of it if only one steer had gone lame, but I can't understand a dozen."

They rode slowly toward the lame steers.

"Great guns," exclaimed Ted, bending low in his saddle to examine the steers closely.

"What is it?" asked Stella, excitedly.

"This is terrible," said Ted. "If this keeps up we might as well shoot all the cattle and let them lie out here on the prairie the prey to the wolves. We will never get them back to Moon Valley."

Stella looked at him with an expression of consternation on her face.

"These cows and steers have been hamstrung," said Ted, with a tone of suppressed rage in his voice. "Any man who would do a trick like that ought to be shot down in his tracks like a mad dog."

"Hamstrung! I don't understand."

"Some inhuman brute has ridden up behind these crippled animals, and with a sharp knife has cut the tendons or leaders behind the hoofs or rather in the ankles, laming them and preventing them from being able to follow a drive. Where would we be in the spring if any large portion of our beasts were so maimed?"

"What a brutal thing to do!" exclaimed Stella, in indignation.

"Hello, what's that?"

Ted rose in his stirrups, standing and shading his eyes with his hand against the glare of the setting sun on the snow. With the other hand he was pointing off toward the east, where the cattle were milling uneasily.

"Something wrong over there," said Stella.

They rode slowly in that direction to see what was disturbing the cattle.

As they went, Ted was looking for other hamstrung beasts.

"By Jove! this is getting worse and more of it," he

exclaimed. "See there! That steer has had the tendons of his leg cut to-day. The wound is fresh. It has hardly stopped bleeding. I wonder——"

But before he had finished the sentence he applied the quirt to his pony and was dashing through the herd, with Stella close behind.

He had seen something strange and out of the way in the milling herd, and while he thought he knew what it was he could hardly believe that it could be true.

As he rode he drew his revolver, and broke it to see that its chambers were filled.

Ted's face was pale and stern, and Stella saw at a glance that he was terribly angry, and had the look in it that she had observed there several times when he had seen animals being used with cruelty.

As he dashed into the milling herd he gave a cry of rage.

At the same moment a man sprang to an upright position in the midst of the cattle, and gave a cry of surprise.

Over his shoulders hung the fresh hide of a cow, with the skin of the head and the horns protruding above his head.

He gave one swift glance at Ted, then threw the hide to the ground and set out at a run through the plunging beasts.

Ted was hampered by the cattle getting in his way, and was not making much progress, but he was beating the horned beasts aside with his quirt.

It was possible even yet that the man who was running from him would escape, and this was what Ted was trying with all his might to prevent.

Ted knew why the man was among the cattle protected from them by his disguise of the cow's hide.

He had been hamstringing them by the wholesale.

In one day the inhuman brute could destroy for range use a whole herd.

In the meantime the cattle were growing wilder and wilder from the pain caused by the hamstringer's knife, the wild career of the unmounted man among them, and Ted and Stella pressing through them from the rear with shouts and cracking quirts.

"Great Scott! They'll get him!" shouted Ted, reining in his pony.

The furious steers had turned their attention to the man on foot, and were surging about him with angry bellowings, charging upon him, and crowding him.

He was in a very perilous position, and it was only that the cattle were herded so close together that he had not gone down sooner.

But once the cattle got him down he would be gored and trampled to death. Nothing could save him.

Ted and Stella were trying to force their way to his side, but were unable to do so.

Notwithstanding the fact the fellow had been caught in the act of mutilating his cattle, Ted could not see him die without trying to save him.

Now they heard a cry of fear, and saw the man throw his arms up in the air.

The cattle were surging about him with wild and angry bovine cries, and with a great tossing of horns, and leaps into the air.

There were muffled yells of agony from beneath the tossing mass of horns.

"They've got him," muttered Ted. "They are wreaking their own revenge."

"Are they killing him, Ted?" asked Stella.

"They have got him down. The fool he was to go among them on foot. He should have known better."

Ted made another effort to get through the cattle, and at last succeeded in making a lane for himself.

"Stella," he shouted over his shoulder, "you stay where you are. This is nothing for you to see. Better let me attend to this."

Stella was aware that Ted always knew what he was talking about when he warned her away from anything, and she made her way out of the herd.

When Ted got to the spot where he had last seen the man, the cattle were still milling, but were getting calmer, and had no hesitancy in scattering when he rode among them slashing right and left with his quirt and firing his revolver over their heads.

When he had cleared an open space he rode back into it, and instantly recoiled from the sight presented to him.

On the ground lay the hamstringer, a mass of bloody clothes in which were torn flesh and broken bones. He was quite dead, and had been not only gored but had been trampled hundreds of times.

The vengeance of the maimed animals was complete.

CHAPTER VII.

A NIGHT RAID.

Ted bent over the mangled body of the hamstringer and turned him over. Then he leaped back with an exclamation of horror.

He had recognized the miscreant.

It was Sol Flatbush, the traitorous cow-puncher, member of the gang of cattle rustlers and gamblers headed by Shan Rhue, who had run off about five hundred head of cattle of the Circle S brand into the Wichita Mountains in Indian Territory.

But how had Sol Flatbush got into this part of the country? And where was he stopping? It was evident that the cow-puncher and desperado had hamstrung the cattle out of revenge for having been discovered and driven out of the young rough rider camp.

Now that he was dead, however, Ted lost all his resentment, and was genuinely sorry for the poor chap because of the horrible means of his death.

Ted hardly knew what to do with him. It were better if his friends could take charge of his body and bury it, but where were his friends?

Suddenly a thought occurred to Ted. Perhaps Sol Flatbush, following his instincts and habits, had come north after he and Shan Rhue had been outwitted by the boys at the Hole in the Wall in the Wichita Mountains, and allied himself with the Whipple gang in the Sweet Grass Mountains.

If this were true the simplest thing to do was to send the body of Flatbush to the gang. It would serve, Ted hoped, as a terrible warning to the other members of the gang not to meddle with the affairs of the rough riders.

Not far away Ted saw a pony, saddled and grazing quietly.

Mounting his pony he rode up to it. Tied to the cantle of the saddle was a pair of blankets.

This was the very thing! Ted carried the blankets to where the body of Flatbush lay. Spreading them out

he rolled the remains of Flatbush into them, and bound them securely with a rope.

With some difficulty he lifted the bundle to the back of the outlaw's pony, and bound it securely with a lariat.

Then he tied the pony's reins to the horn of the saddle, gave the beast a slash with his quirt, and it started, snorting and jumping, toward the distant mountains.

Thus was the body of Sol Flatbush sent to his friends.

"What was it?" asked Stella, when Ted, having finished his gruesome task, returned to her side.

"The chap who was mutilating the cattle is dead," he replied. "The bulls turned upon him and gored and trampled him to death."

"Horrible! Do you know who he was?"

"Yes, I recognized him."

"Is that a fact? Who was he?"

"An old enemy of yours."

"An enemy of mine! I didn't know I had one."

"Not really of your own, for no one who knows you could feel any animosity toward you, Stella. But you have enemies through me. Those who would seek to hurt me do so by making trouble for you, knowing that they can hurt me worse by injuring you than they could by torturing me personally."

"That's why you have so often warned me to be careful where I go alone."

"That is why. It is not fair that you should be put to discomfort or in danger of death merely because I make enemies by trying to force men to obey the laws."

"I understand. But who was the man who was killed?"

"Sol Flatbush."

"Sol Flatbush! How does it happen that he is in this country?"

"I'm sure I don't know, unless he and Shan Rhue, after escaping from the Wichita Mountains, came directly here, having previously been members of the notorious Whipple gang."

"Then I suppose we shall see Shan Rhue one of these days. Ted, I'm afraid of that fellow. When they had me in the Hole in the Wall I heard him make the most horrible threats against you."

"Threats don't hurt, Stella. The threatened man lives long. You know the old proverb. The man I most fear is he who says nothing, but smiles in your face while he is planning to stab you in the back."

They were turned toward the ranch-house, and as darkness was falling swiftly, conversation was suspended as they put their ponies to their highest speed, galloping across the snow-covered range toward where they could see the lantern of the house shining like a beacon through the gloom.

For the safety of the boys and the cow-punchers traveling toward the ranch-house in the dark, Ted had placed a large lantern on the top of the flagstaff which stood in the front yard, so that it could be seen for miles at night to guide wanderers.

This had been suggested by his experience the first night they had spent at the house.

Those of the boys who were not riding line were stopping at the house, and they were all in the big living-room awaiting the coming of Ted and Stella.

When Stella was late in arriving at the house, Mrs. Graham began to grow anxious and worried, and this was communicated to the others.

But when they heard Ted's ringing yell outside, as he and Stella galloped up, there were shouts of gladness.

inside, and the big door was thrown open, allowing a broad path of light to fall across the prairie, as two cow-punchers came bounding down the steps to take the ponies to the corral.

After supper Ted told of the maiming of the cattle and the death of Sol Flatbush.

It was part of the life at the ranch that bad news of any sort was never told at the table during meals, and if any of the fellows had a grievance or was in trouble he tried to keep that fact out of his face and look as merry as he could while the others were eating. If he wanted to tell his troubles later, and any one was willing to listen, all right and good, but meal-time was glad time where the young rough riders and their friends sat down together.

While they were sitting before the great fireplace after supper, Clay Whipple was looking into the flames with a preoccupied air.

He had been silent all evening, an unusual thing for him, for usually he injected humorously dry comments into general conversations.

"What's the trouble, Clay?" asked Stella, who was always the first to notice when one of the boys was not his usual self.

"Oh, I don't know," said Clay, uneasily.

"Reckon he's worryin' some on account o' this yere mountain bandit bein' ther same name as him," laughed a cow-puncher named "Pike" Bander.

"I reckon you're only joshin', 'Pike,'" said Clay quietly, but growing a shade paler.

"Why shore, Clay. Yer didn't think I wuz in earnest?" Pike hastened to say.

Clay's Kentucky blood would not permit him to receive without resentment any reflections against the South or the people of his family, while he could stand any amount of personal joshing without growing in the least touchy or angry.

"Then what's the matter?" asked Ted, as Clay returned to his gloomy contemplation of the fire.

"I'm worried some, that's all," was the reply.

"Tell your troubles to the policeman, that's us."

"Well, I might as well out with it. Only I don't want to appear as if I was gettin' panicky over nothing."

"What is it, Clay? You are so provoking when I am just dying to hear about it," cried Stella with a laugh. "Out with it."

"Injuns!" said Clay, explosively.

"Indians!"

Every one around the fire sat up with a jump.

Clay nodded his head slowly without taking his eyes from the fire.

There was silence for a few minutes, for every one was turning this new menace over in their minds.

The danger from Indians in this far-away northern country was very real. It was not that the Indians would make any open or daring attacks, but that they were lawless and fearless of the authority of the United States, and despised the "buffalo-soldiers" at the near-by army posts.

"Buffalo-soldier" is a name of contempt given by the Indians to the negro troops who had been stationed near the Blackfeet and Crow Indian agencies, on account of their curly, woolly hair, which, in the fantastic minds of the Indians, resembled the short, curly hair on the shoulders of the buffalo.

The negro troops were too near their own color to demand much respect from the Indians.

But the danger did not come so much from the reservation Indians, as from the fugitive Indians who had left the reservations and had become outlaws, allying themselves with the white bandits in the mountains, and living by thievery from the ranchmen and sheep-herders.

Some of these Indians had rallied around Running Bear, a young Blackfeet, son of a chief, a graduate of the Indian School at Carlisle, in Pennsylvania.

Running Bear was a young fellow of magnificent physique, for he had been a member of the famous Indian football-team of Carlisle that had a year or two previously cleared all white teams from the gridiron.

Running Bear was well educated also, and a man of fine address and manners, when he wished to be so. But he was unprincipled, and when he returned to the tribe lost no time in breaking all the laws imposed by the United States for the government and welfare of the Indians.

This brought him into conflict with the Indian Agent, and certain penalties were imposed on him. This he would not stand, and soon persuaded other of the young men of the tribe to mutiny against the agent.

This led to further trouble, and after committing some unforgivable offense against the United States, Running Bear rallied his young men, and they fled the reservation and the ways and protection of the white men, and took to the mountains, where they lived by raiding the ranches in the neighborhood, and maintaining a sort of defensive partnership with Whipple's band of white outlaws.

After a silence, during which every one was turning these facts over in his mind, Ted turned to Clay, and said:

"What about the Indians, Clay?"

"I saw their tracks."

"Where?"

"In the coulée back of the house."

"Near the house!" exclaimed Ted. "That's getting pretty close to home. Did they see you?"

"I reckon they did. I took a shot at one of them, an' he left a red trail in the snow."

"That's bad, Clay. You shouldn't have shot at him."

"Shouldn't, eh? Well, you never saw a fellow from ole Kaintuck that would stand up an' let a man shoot at him without sending his compliments back—if he happened to be packin' his gun at the time."

"Did they shoot at you, then?"

"One of them did. It was like this. I was ridin' in from the west, where I had seen a small bunch of strays which I turned back to the main herd. As I was comin' up to the big coulée I saw something move against the snow. At first I thought it was a grouse, and was just going to take a shot at it when I looked again. Then, by jinks, I saw that it was the head of an Indian shoved up over the edge of the coulée."

"His back was turned to me, and he was watching the house. I pulled in my pony and kept my eye on him for several minutes."

"Then I saw Mrs. Graham come out of the house and stand for a moment on the back porch."

"The Indian rose up and brought a rifle to his shoulder. At that I let out a yell, and he turned to me like a flash, and pulled his trigger. But he was in too much of a hurry, an' the ball whistled over my head."

"I had my gun out, an' blazed away. The Indian

yawped as if he had been hit, and disappeared. I got to the coulée as fast as I could, but he had disappeared."

"Was he the only one?" asked Ted.

"I reckon not, for there were any number of moccasin tracks in the coulée, and the footprints of white men or Indians who wore boots. There was a splotch of blood where the Indian had been, and a red trail leading to where there had been ponies. Then I came on to the house."

Ted was thinking deeply. At last he raised his head.

"This has been a day full of things that may mean a great deal to us," he said. "Follansbee has been shot by a member of the Whipple gang, Sol Flatbush was killed after mutilating our cattle, more Whipple gang; and an Indian prowler has been shot, some more of the Whipple gang. Boys, the war is on, and it depends on us whether it is going to last all winter and cause us to lose all our cattle, or whether we are going to be able to stamp it out right now. Which shall it be?"

"I reckon we'd better get busy. It'll be easier ter do the job now than fuss along with it all winter," said "Pike" Bander, who was an old northern cow-puncher, and had had lots of experience with the Indians in Montana, the Dakotas, and Wyoming.

"I think you're right, Pike," said Ted. "And now off to bed with you. There'll be something doing to-morrow."

In half an hour the house was dark, and every one was asleep.

The moon which had been shining brightly during the early part of the night had become obscured by a heavy bank of snow-clouds, which had been driven over the mountains by a north wind, and it had grown much darker outside.

In his sleep Ted seemed to hear the well-known voice of Sultan, whinnying shrilly. It was a dream, and Ted tossed uneasily. But again and again he heard Sultan's voice. It had a note of alarm in it, and Ted knew that Sultan seldom gave an alarm of this sort unless something serious was the matter. Ted's dream was of Indians, and the call of Sultan was very natural, for the little black stallion hated Indians, and whenever one came within smelling distance of him he grew uneasy and fretful, and always gave voice to his fear.

The dream had such a disquieting influence on Ted that it woke him, and he sat up in bed grinning to himself in the dark to find that, after all, it was only a dream, and that he was safe in bed.

But what was that?

He was awake now, and he distinctly heard Sultan. Then he had heard his pet give a warning, even in his dream.

Leaping from bed Ted groped around the room, getting into his clothes, without lighting the lamp.

Grasping his rifle from the corner, and buckling on his belt and holster, he left the room.

As he passed Clay's room he entered and shook the sleeping Kentuckian, who was on the floor with a bound. Ted told him of the continued voicing of an alarm by Sultan, and Clay hurriedly dressed.

They passed into the living-room, and Ted went to the windows on one side, while Clay went to the other side.

Hidden by the curtains they stood looking out on the snow-covered plain.

"Hist!" It was Clay trying to attract Ted's attention. Ted went swiftly to his side.

"What's that down by the corral?" whispered Clay.

Ted looked sharply.

"It's the Indians," said Ted. "They're trying to steal our horses. Sultan knows what he's about. Come on, we'll have to rush them."

Ted heard a rustling noise behind him and turned.

It was Stella, fully dressed, and with her rifle resting in the hollow of her arm.

"I heard Sultan, too," she said. "We'll have to hurry if we're going to save the horses."

"You go back to bed," said Ted. "Yi-yi-yipee!"

His voice rang out in the old Moon Valley yell.

It was like a fire-bell to a fireman, and brought the boys out of their beds like a shot, and they scrambled into their clothes and were in the living-room with their arms in a jiffy.

In the corral a great commotion was taking place, to judge from the noise that came to them.

At the word of command they rushed through the door, and raced for the corral, turning loose the long yell.

They heard guttural shouts in the distance, and a band of ponies came through the gateway of the corral, scattering over the prairie.

Behind them rushed a band of Indians, who, seeing that there was no further occasion for silence, gave forth whoops of defiance.

Then Ted saw Sultan gallop out, and on his back was an Indian.

This was more than Ted could stand, and his rifle flew to his shoulder. There was a flash and a crash, and the Indian fell to the ground, over which he writhed in agony.

Ted whistled, and Sultan trotted to his side.

The ponies had scattered, and the corral was empty.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WAR-PARTY.

The Indians had fled in every direction.

They had been foiled in their purpose of running the ponies off in a band, as they had intended, by Ted's fortunate discovery of the raid.

How to gather the ponies together again was the question that puzzled Ted; for the young rough riders had no mounts with which to pursue the would-be thieves.

It was not long before the light appeared in the east, and by that time Ted had ridden to Bud's sign-camp, and thence to camp number two, and had four more horsemen to assist him in the pony round-up.

These worked unceasingly, riding the snowy prairie, picking up the ponies which the Indians had not been able to round into a bunch to drive to their rendezvous in the mountains.

The attack upon them had been so sudden that they had taken no heed of where they were going. It was every man for himself, with the young riders' bullets for the hindmost.

About noon Ted and the boys from the sign-camps rode up to the ranch-house, driving before them a band of about twenty ponies which they had found grazing on the prairie or seeking the shelter of the coulées.

Not a sign of the marauding Indians had they seen.

"Boys, as soon as we can get something to eat we're going after those Indians," said Ted, dismounting and

going into the house. "We've got mounts for nearly all of us, now. A guard will be left at the house, then we'll get on their trail. We can't afford to let this thing go. Those Indians must be taught a lesson, so that they will get over the idea that they can run in on us and take what they want just because we are boys."

"That's ther way ter talk," exclaimed Bud Morgan, heartily. "Give 'em what's comin' to 'em, an' give it to 'em good an' plenty."

"I guess it won't be any snap to find them now," said Ben.

"They've scattered. But we can trail them. They'll leave a track like that of a moose, it will be so wide. They're in the hills somewhere, laying for another opportunity to raid the corral. They need ponies to ride, and beef to eat, and they have got the idea into their heads that we were sent out here to cater to their wants. It's our business to fool them."

"Oh, hurry up," cried Stella. "I'm so anxious to get started I'm all in a flutter."

"Who said you were going?" asked Ted, with a smile. "This is no pleasure trip. Trailing and fighting Indian outlaws is no matinee."

"I should say not," said Stella, coolly. "But it's work for the rough riders, and I'm one of them. Bud has promised to teach me the art of following an Indian trail, and there never will be a better time than this."

Ted could only shrug his shoulders, as he turned away to see if McCall was hurrying dinner. He knew that he would waste time arguing with the spirited young woman, who was as good a cowgirl as he was a cowboy, and for one of her sex quite as courageous.

So eager were the boys to be off that they fairly bolted their food, and rushed to the corral to saddle their cayuses.

Then they saw to their arms, and each took his rifle in the boot of his saddle.

Sultan had had such a hard day's work since daylight, rounding up the scattered ponies, that Ted left him in the corral, and decided to ride a fresh horse. The only serviceable animal he could find was the worst riding beast on the place, a vicious, half-broken Texas pony, which had to be roped and held before the rider could mount.

This, however, made little difference to Ted, who could ride anything that would fit a saddle.

While he held the saddle ready to throw it on Bingo's back Bud roped and held the rearing, raging, bucking beast, who was busy kicking holes in the air with his wicked heels.

After maneuvering around the corral several times, Ted managed to dodge the flying hoofs long enough to slip the saddle and tie the latigo.

Then it was up to him to mount.

Whenever he approached Bingo from the rear, dancing around to escape the pony's battery, and got to the side where he could grasp the horn of his saddle, Bingo would wheel in a circle away from him as if he was fastened to a pivot.

The performance was getting monotonous, for the boys were standing around in a ring waiting to start.

Ted was getting impatient also, at the fool antics of the pony.

"Stop your fooling," he said to Bingo. "When I do land on your back I'll make you sorry you didn't stand still, my bucko."

He stepped back several feet and stood looking at the pony, who, with ears flattened and the whites of his eyes showing, stood still also, waiting for further developments.

He didn't know exactly what was coming, but wanted to be ready for it, whatever it was to be.

Suddenly Ted gave a short, swift run, leaped in the air, and before Bingo could gather himself for a plunge, Ted was astraddle of the saddle.

Bingo remembered his part then, but he was too late for simultaneously he felt the sting of the quirt across his shoulder, and the prick of the spur in his flank.

A horse can think of only one thing at a time, while a mule can pay attention to the mule-skinner's lash and think of forty-seven varieties of devilment at the same time.

In trying to keep his mind on the sting of the quirt and the prick of the rowels at the same time, Bingo got rattled.

He leaped high into the air, intending to fall backward, and crush his rider. But Ted had been there before many times, and as he went up a stinging blow across Bingo's withers brought him down in a hurry.

Then he did some more plunging, but the spur in his side, and Ted's firm seat, soon convinced him that it was wasting time to fool with Ted, and he set off at a gallop across the prairie.

With a ringing cheer the boys followed, and soon caught up with him.

When they were together again, Ted paired the boys off to scout.

"I'll tell you how you will probably find it, fellows," said Ted. "The Indians ride in different directions. Whenever you hit a trail follow it, but go slow and keep your eyes peeled for an ambuscade. You will find that eventually all the trails will lead to the same place. If we are in luck we will find them before they go on into the mountains, and we may have a skirmish. I hope, however, that we will be able to settle the matter without resorting to any shooting. Uncle Sam is mighty touchy about any one killing his Indians except his soldiers, no matter what an Indian does. We'll probably all come together where the Indians are. Kit, you ride with me. You other fellows choose your partners. Bud, take good care of Stella."

"Yer kin bet yer active an' useful life I will," said Bud, as he and Stella galloped off together.

Bud and Kit rode away to the north, while the other rough riders spread out in pairs over the prairie.

Ted had been riding an hour without crossing a track.

"There's no use going in this direction any longer, Kit," he said. "They've probably gone farther to the west. I guess we'd better strike off that way, and take a chance of cutting them somewhere over there."

They had paused on the bank of a small frozen stream lined with willows, and Ted had dismounted to walk up and down the bank to find a place where he could break a hole in the ice to water the ponies.

"You'll have to rope Bingo and hold him when I go to get on," he said to Kit before he got down.

"All right," said Kit. "I'd get down and cut that hole in the ice myself only my arm might give me trouble again. I've got to be mighty careful of it yet."

As Ted was looking for a safe place to lead the ponies down to the stream, with Bingo's bridle-reins hanging

over his arm, he was startled by a snort from the brute, and a sudden back pull.

He looked over his shoulder at the pony to see what was the matter with it.

Bingo was standing with his head high, his ears pointed forward, his nostrils as red as if they were lined with red silk, and the whites of his eyes like pieces of chalk, snorting as if in terror.

Ted read the symptoms instantly.

"He smells Indians," he muttered to himself.

He looked around for Kit, and saw him far down the stream, struggling vainly with the pony he was riding, which was running away in a panic of fear.

Kit was an expert and dauntless horseman, and not one of the rough riders except Ted could excel him in horsemanship, but with his wounded arm he could not bring the brute under control.

"That settles it with me," muttered Ted. "I'm going to have a time getting on the back of this beast, for he will be worse than ever now that he has scented Indians."

He heard a noise behind him, and wheeled.

Coming out of the willows a few hundred yards away were a score of Indians, painted for war and all armed with rifles.

With a hasty movement the King of the Wild West loosened his revolvers and glanced to see if his rifle was ready for instant use.

The Indians had stopped, as much surprised as Ted, and stood staring at him in a stupid sort of way.

Ted saw that if he was to escape being murdered now was his chance, and turned to his pony.

As he did so the Indians let out a whoop that frightened Bingo almost into a fit, and wheeling suddenly he dashed away, almost dragging the reins from Ted's grasp.

But as he did so Ted was by his side, running with one hand clutching the long mane.

It was rough running over the rocks and hummocks with which the bank of the stream was strewn, but Ted seemed to fly through space, so lightly did his feet touch the ground.

Rifle-balls were now singing through the air above Ted, and on every side, which only served to increase the speed with which Bingo was running away from his enemies, the Indians.

Bingo had been trained in New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas to regard the Indian as his natural enemy, and whenever he smelled one it was his most earnest desire to get as far away as possible in the shortest space of time.

This was fortunate for Ted also.

While it was not an easy matter for Ted to mount while the pony was wheeling away from him, Ted was well educated in the cavalry drill as used at West Point, and mounting a running horse was one of the easiest of the many equestrian tricks with which he was familiar.

When he thought he was far enough away from the Indians not to afford them too good an aim for his body he placed his hand on the cantle of the saddle, gave a smart upward spring, and the impetus of his running and the pony's speed took him through the air like a bird and he settled in the saddle as easily, almost, as if he would have sat down in a chair.

As he reached the saddle he, for the first time, threw a glance over his shoulder.

The Indians were in full pursuit, yelling like madmen.

They were led by a young fellow dressed in a yellow

buckskin shirt elaborately beaded, and trimmed with fringe, while on his head was a bonnet of eagle feathers, which trailed far behind him as he dashed on far in advance of his followers.

"Here's a chance to stop that chap," said Ted, swinging around in his saddle and throwing his .45 over his shoulder.

The six-shooter cracked, and as the smoke floated away Ted saw that his bullet had gone where he intended it to go.

The pony on which the young Indian was riding stumbled and staggered forward a few feet, then dropped.

That brought the party to a halt, and Ted, turning his face forward, galloped on.

Kit had succeeded in mastering his pony and had brought it to a halt, and, as the report of Ted's revolver reached his ears, he turned and rode rapidly in that direction.

As the two boys came together, and found that they were unharmed and that the war-party of Indians had been halted, they dove into a coulee, followed it a short distance, and climbed again to higher ground.

The Indians were no longer in sight, and they set off at a gallop toward the west.

For half an hour they rode, when Ted suddenly pulled his pony to a stop.

On a rise far away he saw a black, slowly moving mass, which, at first, he had taken to be a band of buffalo, but when it strung out he discovered that it was a party of men on horseback.

As the sun was behind the riders, Ted could not distinguish whether or not they were Indians or whites, as he could have done if the sun had been shining upon them.

"If it's Indians I don't want any more of it," he said.

"I don't think they are Indians," said Kit. "Those fellows sit straighter than Indians. I believe they are either our own boys, or cavalry from the post."

"I believe you are right," said Ted. "Let's fire a few shots to attract their attention, and then ride to them."

The shots were fired, and presently they heard several faint reports, and knew that they had been heard and answered.

In a few minutes they had ridden to where the party was standing on the ridge of a rolling hill.

They were the rough riders under the leadership of Ben Tremont. They had all come together on a broad trail that pointed toward the foot-hills in the north, and as they rode had picked up one pair of scouts after another.

"Where are Bud and Stella?" asked Ted, running his eye over the party.

"Haven't seen anything of them," said Ben, "although we have been keeping a lookout for them. They rode farther to the west, and probably will pick us up later. I think this trail leads into the hills, and that we will find the Indians in camp not far away."

This was Ted's belief also, and taking the leadership he ordered an advance.

"Halt!" The King of the Wild West had stopped his pony, and with his hand shading his eyes was looking steadily to the front.

"What is it?" asked Ben, riding to his side.

"Smoke over the top of that hill right in front of us."

Ted did not take his eyes from the spot.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "The bunch of Indians who chased me have taken a short cut and beaten us in. I saw a band of Indians cross in front of us and one pony carried double."

"Then we have caught up with them."

"I think so. Hold the boys here, I'm going forward to scout. When I signal, come forward as fast as you can ride."

CHAPTER IX.

A BATTLE OF QUIRTS.

Ted turned Bingo over to one of the boys to care for and crept forward stealthily toward the hill behind which he had seen a thin thread of blue smoke rising in the still air.

No one but an Indian or a trained scout would build so small a fire. A tenderfoot would have made one that roared and sent a vast cloud of smoke toward the sky to attract any enemy that might be in the vicinity.

But an Indian builds his fire in a space not much larger than the hollow of his two hands, and manages to send up smoke that only a trained eye could detect, and at the same time have heat enough with which to warm himself and cook his food, with as little fuel as possible. As he went forward, Ted was surprised that he came upon no sign of a camp-guard.

The Indians evidently thought that the boys would not have the courage to follow them into their own country, and had grown careless.

So much the better. It would give him a chance to learn how they were situated before making an attack.

He crept on his hands and knees to the ridge of the hill, and, removing his hat, peered over the edge.

Below in a small valley he saw about fifty Indians, who, from their dress and their manner of painting their faces, he knew to be of various tribes.

He easily recognized in the band several Blackfeet, six or seven Crows, some Sioux, who had come far north, and to his astonishment a few southern Indians, such as Caddos, Cheyennes, and Comanches.

This alone was enough to convince him that the Indians were outlaws and renegades, and that they were plunderers and thieves, as well; probably murderers hiding out from the United States troops.

In the circle about the fire he soon discovered the young fellow whose pony he had shot beside the frozen stream.

The young Indian, for he did not appear much older than Ted himself, was holding forth to a number of other Indians.

Probably he was boasting of his pursuit of the white boy, and the unfortunate mishap that brought down his pony and prevented him from bringing a white captive into camp.

Not far away from this group Ted observed a man dressed in Indian garb, who yet did not act like the other Indians. An Indian has a peculiar slouching walk, while this man strode about with the smarter, quicker, springier tread of a white man.

Presently the supposed Indian drew from his belt a pouch of tobacco and some cigarette-papers, and proceeded to roll a cigarette.

Northern Indians do not roll cigarettes; they smoke pipes. It is only the Indians of the Southwest who

take their solace from tobacco through the little home-made paper tubes.

"That's a fellow who has been a cow-puncher," said Ted. "He's a white man disguised as an Indian. Probably one of the Whipple gang. I've got my opinion of a white man who will play Indian, and live with the dirty scoundrels," said Ted to himself, with disgust.

He had seen all that was necessary, and had laid his plan of attack in his mind.

Creeping down the hill, he threw his hand in the air as a signal for the boys to come to him, also signaling for silence.

In a few minutes they were by his side, and while one of the fellows held Bingo safely Ted sprang into the saddle.

"Now, fellows, we're going to ride around the end of this hill and plump into the Indian camp. The snow will deaden the hoofbeats of the ponies, but keep as still as possible. We'll surprise them, and probably be able to settle the whole thing without firing a shot. But don't bet on it, and keep your hands on your guns, but don't fire until they make the first crack, then rush them and drive them into the hills, and bring down all you can."

With this advice they rode forward by twos, Ted and Ben in the lead.

It did not take long to round the hill, and then, as suddenly as if they had opened a door and stepped into a room, they were in the midst of the Indians.

No such surprising and sudden attack was ever made. The Indians stood as if they were carved of wood as the boys rode up to them, staring open-mouthed.

Only one of them made a break—the young Indian whom Ted had dismounted.

For several moments not a word was said.

Ted saw instantly that the young rough riders had all the best of it, and that the Indians had been taken completely by surprise, for not one of them was armed. Their rifles and guns were either still on their saddles, and the ponies were standing some distance away, or they were stacked beside a ledge of rock twenty or more feet from the fire, where most of them were congregated.

The young fellow whom Ted had foiled stared for a moment with a look of contempt and dislike.

Suddenly he made a rush to where the guns were standing.

"Stop!" Ted's voice rang out sharply. But the youth continued to run.

"Stop, or I'll kill you," shouted Ted again.

Then an old Indian cried out something in the tongue of the Blackfeet, and the young fellow halted suddenly and came walking back with a sulky look on his face.

The old Indian who had stopped the youth now stepped a little ways forward, and holding up his hands in a peace-sign, began to talk.

"You are my brothers," he said, "and Flying Sun, the medicine-man, welcomes you to our camp."

Ted held up his hands in a sign of peace also, but said nothing.

"He's a darned old hypocrite," said Ben, in an aside to Ted. "He has murder in those little red eyes of his, if ever a man had."

"I'm on to him," said Ted. "Keep your eyes on that bunch, and give it to them if they start anything treacherous."

"My white brothers come with peace for their red

brothers. Join us at the fire. Warm yourselves; eat of our meat."

"We are willing to be brothers," said Ted. "But one brother does not steal the ponies from the corral of the other."

"That was the work of the young men, and they are now sorry for it," said the medicine man.

Ted looked at the young fellow whom he had unhorsed, and saw that his face was distended in a sarcastic smile.

"The young brave yonder is the one who led the raid on my corral. He does not look sorry," said Ted, pointing to the offender.

Flying Sun threw a glance in the direction of the young man, and said a few words sharply in the Black-foot tongue.

"Crazy Cow is young and the son of a chief. His blood is hot within him, and he does not know what he does," said Flying Sun.

Crazy Cow's face at once assumed a look of sadness.

"I have not come for war," said Ted gravely, "but I want to warn you and your tribe that I will not stand for any raids on our ranch. You will find that we are good fighters, and that we can kill just as well as the soldiers. The ranch is ours, and the cattle and horses are ours, and do not belong to the young men of your tribe. They must leave us alone, or we will be compelled to deal out justice to them in our own way, which is a hard one."

"Very well, my brother," said the wily old chief. "We desire to live in peace with our white brothers. Your cattle and horses shall be sacred to our young men."

"I mean this," said Ted, looking at the old man severely. "Keep your young men away from our ranch, or they will be killed."

At this Crazy Cow threw himself up to his full height, and looked at Ted with scorn.

"Two can make killing," he said, in perfectly plain English.

"Perhaps they can," said Ted quickly. "But I want to say to you particularly, that if you are ever seen within the lines of the Long Tom Ranch again you will be sorry that you ever were born. I have said enough. Get on your horses and go. You are now on the ranch. Get beyond it."

The young Indian gave a short, harsh laugh, and strode toward a pony, decorated after the fashion of war-ponies with feathers and bits of red flannel woven into his mane and tail.

The other Indians were not slow to follow his example, and soon they were all mounted.

"Now look out for treachery," said Ted in an aside to the boys.

"Keep your eyes peeled, fellows," said Ben, passing the word along back.

"Ride up in open order so that we can surround that bunch if they get gay," said Ted in a low voice, and the boys rode out and scattered themselves in a long line.

The Indians were bunched pretty well together.

It was a critical moment.

The slightest suspicious move on the part of the boys might have alarmed the Indians and started a fight.

While the boys kept their hands on their weapons not one was drawn.

The Indians rode off to a distance of a few hundred

feet, then halted. All had their rifles or guns in their hands, but not in a hostile way.

They were well aware that the white boys were much better armed than they, and were not in a temper to stand any foolishness.

It seemed as if the Indians had stopped to say good-by before riding away into the mountains.

But when they stopped Crazy Cow rode out from them a short distance and stopped.

"I am Crazy Cow," he said in a boastful way.

This was in the manner of a personal challenge, as if he had said: "Who the deuce are you? Knock the chip off my shoulder if you dare."

Ted looked at him for a moment, for Crazy Cow was staring at him with an impertinent look in his face.

"I don't care who you are," said Ted, who was disgusted with the fellow's airs. "If you were the chief himself I would tell you to keep away from my cows and ponies. What is the son of a chief? Nothing!"

The tone in which Ted said this was such that the young Indian flushed a deeper red, and grasped his rifle harder.

"I am an educated Indian," said Crazy Cow, "and as good as any white man. This is my country, and I shall go wherever I please."

"Go where you will, except on my ranch. Keep off that."

The Indian shrugged his shoulders.

"I go where I please. You, whoever you are, have no right to prevent me from going anywhere. Who are you to talk to me like that?"

"My name is Ted Strong. I am a deputy United States marshal. Do you know what that is?"

"Yes. I spit on them."

"Well, here's one you won't spit on. That's a cinch. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, a man who got his education free from the United States, to talk that way."

"Bah! I hate the United States which robbed my people of their lands, and then made treaties only to break them. Since they have driven me into the mountains they owe me a living, and I'm going to collect it."

"Very well, only be careful how you do it. I have said enough."

"Ted Strong talks big and much, but does nothing. He is a coward who is afraid of the Indian."

"I am not afraid of you. I think I have shown it."

"Yes, but you ran when I surprised you by the stream."

"My pony ran, and to keep from losing him I clung to him."

"It was a good thing for you that he did run. If he hadn't you would never have gone home again, and the lizzards and vultures, assisted by the prairie-wolves, would have you by now."

"Big talk means nothing. You are not a fighter, you are a squaw. You are a fool and a boaster."

"No, I am a chief, and a warrior. I have seen the blood of the white man flow, and I drank it. I am brave."

"You're full of hot air. Run along now; I'm disgusted with you."

"Hah! White squaw afraid to fight. Go back to your camp, and cook the meals and wash the clothes in the tub."

Crazy Cow made motions of scrubbing at a tub.

At this the other Indians burst into laughter.

"You are but an idle boaster, Crazy Cow. You make much noise like the wind in the trees. That is all it amounts to. You do not make me feel bad by what you say."

Crazy Cow, seeing that he could not get Ted angry with his banter, tried a new tack.

"Hah, little bay pony," he cried, addressing Bingo. "Are you a squaw pony?"

He paused in a listening attitude as if he was paying close attention to what the pony was saying.

"Yes, you are ashamed to be ridden by a squaw who does not fight, but only talks. Come over here, squaw pony, and be ridden by a man."

Again his speech was greeted by the laughter of the Indians, to whom it was interpreted by the disguised white man.

"So you think I will not fight, eh? You think I am a squaw, do you?" said Ted quietly.

The Indian only laughed.

"I will show you who is the squaw. I will thrash you with my quirt until you cry out with pain. You may keep your gun. I am not afraid of it."

"Now you begin to talk a little like a man. But you won't fight. Little pony, you are ridden by a squaw. Why don't you throw him off and come to me, who is a fighter?"

"Fellows, stand fast," said Ted to the boys. "I'm going to give that young buck such a licking as he never thought possible. If they don't play fair, shoot."

Ted threw his rifle to Ben, so that he would not be burdened by it, and rode toward the Indian, who also threw his weapon to one of his followers. In his right hand he carried a long, braided Indian whip of thongs. It was a cruel weapon, for the Indian is cruel to everything in his power, from his squaw to his dog.

This he grasped firmly in his right hand, and awaited Ted's coming with a satirical smile on his face.

Ted had been coming on quietly, but when he was a few feet from Crazy Cow he suddenly gave Bingo the spur, and the astonished horse reached the Indian's side in two jumps.

Without a moment's hesitation Ted reached forward and grasped the Indian by a collar of leather which he wore laced around his throat, somewhat after the fashion of the white linen chokers worn by young white men.

Furiously the young Indian lashed out with his quirt, which struck Ted across the shoulders, and made him wince with the burning sharpness of it.

But Ted was back at him like a flash, and his quirt sang through the air and slapped upon the buckskin shirt worn by the Indian.

Crazy Cow, whom the lash had not hurt in the least, only laughed.

Ted saw that he might go on thrashing the Indian all day upon his shirt, and that it would have no more effect than if he whipped a covering of iron.

The other Indians also saw the humor of the situation, and joined in the laughter.

Meantime the Indian was plying his quirt with all his force, and every time the lash struck Ted across the shoulders or neck it left a blue welt.

Whipping fights are common among the Indian lads, and are merely tests of courage, and the power to endure pain without crying out. The Indian boy who cries out unexpectedly at some particularly stinging blow

is called a squaw, and sent into Coventry by the others for varying lengths of time, during which none of them will speak to him.

Crazy Cow had often indulged in the whipping sport, and knew how to wield the quirt most effectively.

So the battle of the quirts went on, the blows falling as fast as their arms could fly, but Ted plainly was getting the worst of it on account of the protection which the buckskin shirt gave the Indian.

Ted saw that this soon must change or he would be ignominiously beaten. He had not shown that he suffered any pain from the blows he received, although the Indians watched his face closely for any sign that he was weakening.

At last Ted thought that he had discovered a vulnerable spot.

With a sudden wrench of his strong wrist upon the leather collar which he grasped, he whipped Crazy Cow flat across his saddle and held him there.

Then with all his strength he brought his quirt across the seat of Crazy Cow's blue flannel trousers, which were drawn tight, and upon the tender part of the back of his legs.

The Indian struggled furiously, but could not release himself, and all the while the cruel blows were raining upon him.

A huge burst of laughter rose from the young rough riders, but the Indians could not see the joke, and with angry exclamations started forward to rescue their young chief.

But at this sign of hostility Ben Tremont let out a roar, and every rough rider rifle went to shoulder, and the Indians shrank back in silence.

Ted thrashed the Indian until his yells of agony and his struggles ceased, then threw him aside.

"Go back to your people and tell them that you are no longer fit to be chief. That you have been whipped with a quirt by a white boy until you cried. It is you who are the squaw," said Ted, riding back to his party.

CHAPTER X.

SILVER FACE.

As Ted released the badly punished young Indian and rode back to where the boys were waiting for him, Crazy Cow painfully raised himself to a sitting position in his saddle. But the pain was too great, and he slowly and painfully slid to the ground. But the backs of his legs were so seamed with welts that he could not walk.

He was indeed an object for pity, but he had been defeated, and not only that, but had been whipped on the most shameful spot, in Indian fighting, and his friends would have none of him.

When he looked toward them for sympathy they only pointed the finger of scorn at him, and laughed.

Now Ted rode out in front of the boys and, raising his voice, said to the Indians:

"Go back to your village. Do not come to my ranch again. Next time it will be something worse than quirts with which we fight, and dead men, instead of squaws with sore legs, will be the result. Go!"

The old medicine-man turned his pony toward the mountains, and in a guttural voice gave the command.

Without a word, and without looking back, the In-

dians started on their way, Crazy Cow following dejectedly on foot, leading his pony.

He had been conquered and humiliated, but his heart burned with hatred for the young white chief who had been the cause of it.

When the Indians were out of sight, Ted returned to the boys.

"Well, that's over for the present," he said.

"Yes, but we'll have trouble with those fellows later, you may be sure," said Ben. "Look out for a ball or a knife in the back from Crazy Cow."

"I don't fear him as much as I do the cunning and treachery of that old villain, Flying Sun, who plans these raids and lets the young men execute them while he stays back in a safe place."

"What interests me more than anything else just now is Stella and Bud. I propose that we drop everything else and hunt for them. You know that since the appearance of the man without a face, and now this encounter with the Indians, to say nothing of sending Sol Flatbush's body home on his horse, the members of the Whipple gang will be pretty keen after every member of our party."

"True, Ben. We must be very careful of Stella from now on. I would not have taken this ranch had I known that it was menaced by such a gang of thieves as seems to be in the mountains."

"Where had we better scout?" asked Ben.

"Do you think Bud and Stella went farther west?"

"Yes. As we started away from the ranch-house I heard Bud say to Stella, 'When the gang came out of the corral just before daylight I saw that most of them headed into the west. If we go that way we're sure to beat the others to the trail.' Then I saw them slip away quietly back of the house, and later they disappeared over a rise due west."

"Then that's where we must look for them. Forward, fellows. We're going to find Bud and Stella."

"Do you think it is necessary for all of us to go?" asked Kit.

"No, I don't. The ranch must have a guard of some sort. About half of you turn back to the lines, and two of you ride to the ranch-house to see that all is well, and guard it."

Ben sorted out the fellows who were to go back to the ranch, keeping all the rough riders to start on the hunt for the missing ones.

No one felt exactly uneasy for the safety of Stella and Bud, but it was proper, under the circumstances, to see that they were safe.

"As before, we will split up into couples to search for Bud and Stella," said Ted. "You better come with me this time, Ben."

To the west of the line of the Long Tom Ranch the land became more broken. At first the hills ceased to be rolling and broke off into cañons, more or less deep, with sometimes sides that assumed the dignity of precipices.

The sides of the foot-hills were clothed in small tracts of scrubby pine timber, and altogether it was not a pleasant country to travel over in winter.

* * * * *

When Bud and Stella left the ranch-house, Stella was bubbling over with joy at the prospect of being in the

hunt for the Indians, and the prospect of Bud teaching her the mysteries of the trail, particularly the war-trail.

"Don't say a word," said Bud, with a wink, "an' we'll fool 'em all. Them Injuns never went nowhere except inter ther east. I throwed out a blast o' hot atmosphere erbout them goin' west. That wuz ter fool ole nosy Ben, who had his neck stretched out like a spring chicken's ter hear what was bein' said, an' git ther advantage o' my sooperior knowledge."

"Well, when I see that I thort I'd give him somethin' ter chase, so I hands out the west p'int, when I mean ter go ter ther east. When we start out we'll ride ter ther west until we come ter ther first draw, then foller it ter ther south until we come ter a break leadin' east, then foller that, an' we'll be fust onter ther red man's tracks."

"All right," laughed Stella. "That will be a good joke on Ben. He didn't like it because he couldn't go with us."

Now it will be seen that Bud's little fiction in the hearing of Ben was not the proper thing, and, as it turned out, Bud was mighty sorry for his apparently innocent fib before the end of the day, or the dawning of the next.

They did as Bud planned, and when they were well out of sight and hearing of the other boys they turned to the east, and when well out on the prairie turned their ponies' heads to the north.

As they cantered across the prairie, on which the snow was like dry sand and only about an inch deep, they could see bands of their cattle here and there pawing the snow off the grass, or "rustling" for their fodder, as the cowmen call it.

"I shore believe thar's somethin' wrong on this yere range," Bud remarked after they had gone a few miles.

"Why?" asked Stella.

"Somethin' wrong with ther cattle."

"In what way?"

"Thar ain't half enough o' them here."

"Do you mean that some of them are gone?"

"Yep. Thet's jest what I mean."

"Strayed, probably."

"No. Stole."

"Nonsense. Who could have stolen them? The Indians?"

"No. I reckon not. The Injuns is keen after ponies. In the fust place thar ain't nobody what kin wear out a pony as fast as an Injun. They work their ponies ter death, starve 'em, beat ther hides off'n 'em, neglect 'em, and when they're wore out turn 'em loose fer ther wolves. Second, they kin run off a bunch o' ponies in a hurry, but they balk some at rustlin' cattle because they move so slow. If we air shy on beeves ther white men has got 'em."

"When we get back we ought to round the cattle up and count."

"That's ther only way ter do it. I've got a pretty good eye fer a herd, an' it's my idee thet we're losers here, an' that ther rustlers is gittin' rich off'n us."

About noon Bud pulled in his horse, and examined the snowy ground carefully.

He had struck a trail.

Winding across the prairie in a northeasterly direction was a broad trail, the tracks of many cattle and horses.

"Here we are," said Bud. "Thar's whar some o' our cattle and several ponies have passed."

He got down to the ground and, stooping over the trail, regarded it carefully.

Suddenly he straightened up.

"This is not an Injun trail," he said.

"It isn't?" asked Stella.

"No. Here are the tracks of cattle, an' on top of them those of horses ridden by white men."

"How do you know they were not Indians?"

"Here's an impression o' a horseshoe, an' here's another o' a different size. These were made by animals ridden by white men."

"I can understand why you should know that they were white man's horses because Indians do not shoe their ponies, but I'm blessed if I can see how you know that white men were riding them."

"Easy enough. These horses were ridden straight. An Indian, in spite of stories to the contrary, is not a good horseman. He rides all over the ground instead of straight ahead when he is going anywhere, seemin' as if he wanted to get his money's worth of the ride. If it had been Indians who were driving off these cattle you would see pony-tracks all over the prairie about here."

"Then we've struck the wrong trail."

"Well, we've missed the Indians, but we've struck another and a better lead. Ther boys under Ted will most likely git in ther trail o' ther pony-snatchers, but we're on another lay—cattle-thieves."

"This is something of a surprise, isn't it?"

"You bet. If we hadn't run ercross this yere trail we mightn't have got on ter ther fact thet our steers wuz bein' lifted ontill so many o' them wuz gone thet it would make a big hole in our herd."

"Have they much the start of us?"

"I reckon they have." Bud was down on his knees, looking closely at the tracks.

"Yes," he continued, "they went by here shortly after midnight."

"How do you know?"

"Against ther east side o' each o' these leetle depressions made by a hoof is some fresh snow."

"I don't see how that tells the time."

"I do. Along about midnight last night a wind come up an' blew from ther west fer half an hour. It drifted a little snow before it, which settled inter these depressions an' banked up against ther east side o' these tracks."

"That seems reasonable. Bud, where did you learn all these things about trailing?"

"Never learned them nowhar. It's jest thinkin' about what yer see what makes a scout an' trailer. These cattle is somewhar up in them hills yon. They probably drove until sunup, an' then stopped ter give ther critters a rest before shovin' them inter ther mountings."

"Then I suppose we better hurry. We may be able to find out where they are."

"Righto, we'll mosey. I reckon we've struck a good thing."

"How many beeves do you suppose there were in that steal?"

"Oh, I reckon fifty er sixty."

"Whew! That's worth going after."

Bud had mounted, and they galloped along the trail, which was broad and deep. It led them through coulees and over hills and down into valleys, and the sun was high and the trail apparently endless.

"Bud, let us stop and eat our lunch. I'm hungry," said Stella.

"All right. I'm a bit peckish myself," was the reply.

They were in a narrow valley which was strewn with great boulders, and on the sides of the hills grew a great many scrub pines. Through the center of it ran the broad trail.

The lunch was tied to the cantle of Bud's saddle, while Stella carried a canteen of coffee, for she was a great favorite of McCall, the cook, and when she started out for the day he invariably put up the best lunch a cow-camp could afford.

Bud in the meantime had found a spring on the hill-side and had watered the horses, then made a fire of pine boughs over which they heated the coffee and warmed themselves. Then they began their luncheon.

Bud was so busily appeasing his hunger that he did not say much, and did not think it strange that Stella said nothing. They were seated on opposite sides of the fire, and Bud, thinking that perhaps Stella might need something, looked across at her.

What he saw caused him to stare.

Stella was looking over his head with an expression of horror on her face. Her wide, staring eyes were filled with an unspeakable horror.

Her hand was poised in mid-air, just as if she had been going to put something into her mouth, when the action was arrested by the sight of something that froze her with terror.

"Stella, what's ther matter?" Bud managed to blurt out.

Stella's lips moved, but no sound came from them. She was too frightened to speak.

Then Bud, observing the direction in which she was looking, turned his head.

In an instant he was on his feet. He had become very pale, and his hand shook as he reached slowly toward his holster.

Standing behind him was a creature such as he never had seen before.

It was a man of great stature, clad entirely in black, over which was thrown a long black cloak.

But the horror of the creature was the face. Out of an expressionless mask of silver, without nose or mouth, gleamed a pair of fierce black eyes, that twinkled maliciously. Midway of the face were two holes, nostrils through which he breathed.

It was the man at whom Carl had fired his six harmless bullets—the man with the silver face.

Bud stood staring at him like one frozen, but Stella, when she saw that Bud was as frightened as herself, was able to take her eyes away from those terrible orbs that shone through the silver face, and regained her composure, and now was able to look at him without terror and with curiosity.

There was something fascinating in that blank, rounded, shining white face, lighted only by those remarkable eyes.

What was behind that mask? A face, or only a blank?

Bud had somewhat recovered from the ague of terror into which the sudden appearance of the man with the silver face had thrown him, for he was a brave fellow, and not easily shaken from his courage.

"What do you want?" he asked at last, but yet with a little tremor in his voice.

There was no answer, but the eyes continued to burn in a very suggestive way. It seemed as if the man behind the mask was trying to speak, but could not.

Presently, however, he made a motion with his hand that told them to follow him.

"I'll be derved if we do," said Bud stubbornly. "Who air yer, anyway, an' what business hev yer buttin' in on us this away?"

A strange, inarticulate, bubbling sound came from behind the silver face, but Bud could not understand it.

Again came the signal to follow.

"Not on yer life," said Bud firmly. He drew his revolver, and a look of decision came into his face. When Bud took on this look he meant business.

"Oh, Bud, don't oppose the terrible creature," whispered Stella, to whom fear had come again from looking on that blank but fascinating face.

"No, by jing, I ain't goin' erlong with thet freak. If I could see his face, an' knowed who he wuz I might talk business."

As he said this the eyes behind the silver mask fairly shot forth sparks of anger, and again that horrible bubbling noise was heard.

The creature raised his arm. There was a sudden rush, and Bud felt his arms grasped from behind.

But as this happened he had presence of mind enough to point his revolver at the man in the silver mask and pull the trigger.

The weapon crashed, and, as the smoke cleared away, Bud saw the thing of horror still standing unharmed where he had been, although the revolver had been pointed directly at his heart, while from behind the mask came again that sickening bubbling laugh.

At another signal from the figure Bud was dragged a little way up the hillside, and his wrists were securely tied, his arms embracing a tree.

While this was being done Stella, too frightened to make an outcry, was led away, and, looking over his shoulder, Bud saw her mount her magpie pony and ride away surrounded by four men, led by the man with the silver face, who bestrode a splendid black charger.

Bud was left alone to survive, if he could, the perils of frost and hungry wolves.

CHAPTER XI.

LOST IN THE WILDERNESS.

Stella could not keep her eyes from the silver mask of the man who rode by her side. She was wondering continually at the mystery of him.

For an hour or more they rode up one valley, then across a hill or stretch of prairie, and through valleys again, the black mountains coming nearer all the time, until at last they entered a forest of pines, which they traversed until night began to fall.

At a gesture from "Silver Face," as Stella had named the man who rode by her side, the party came to a halt.

Stella now saw that it was the intention to camp, for, while some of the men cared for the horses, others cut down several small pine-trees and built a shelter of pine boughs into which she was ushered, and before which a blazing fire had been lighted.

It had grown very cold, and Stella was grateful for the heat that filled her shelter.

One of the men had brought food, and a pan and coffee-pot from a pack on one of the horses, and now began to cook supper.

Stella fully realized the peril of her situation, but par-

ticularly that of Bud, who had been left alone, bound and helpless, in that wilderness.

If he had not given the impression to the boys that he was going west instead of east things might have been easier for them, but now Bud might perish of cold or be the prey of wild animals before Ted could come to their rescue, which she was sure he would do soon.

After she had eaten the supper which the man with the silver face brought her with his own hands, she felt better and more cheered, and began to take a brighter view of the situation.

The floor of her lean-to shelter had been thickly strewn with pine boughs, which were soft and aromatic, and Stella reclined upon them, and gazed into the fire, listening to the strange sounds that filled the forest, for the camp was absolutely quiet.

After eating their supper the men had silently smoked their pipes and then curled up on their blankets, which had been spread on mattresses of pine boughs, and were asleep.

Only Silver Face was awake, and he sat wrapped in his cloak near the fire, his eyes taking on a fiercer gleam as the flickering lights struck them.

Stella wondered who he was. Evidently the mask concealed a horrible mystery. Could he talk, and would not? Was that eery, bubbling laugh of his the only articulate sound he could make?

Stella wished she knew more about him, and that he would talk to her.

The night was growing on, but Stella did not feel like sleeping.

Occasionally Silver Face arose and replenished the fire with resinous pine logs, and for a while the flames leaped high, filling the woods with strange shadows and ghostly, wavering spots of light.

Then afar, it seemed, there sounded the night cries of wild animals, timber-wolves, those dreaded monsters of the lupus tribe, and occasionally the scream of the cougar, like a woman in agony. Then, close behind her shelter, there sounded a horrible snarling shriek. It was the night cry of a bob cat close at hand, attracted to the camp by the scent of the meat which had been cooked for supper.

It was so near and clear that for a moment Stella's heart seemed to stop beating altogether, and she felt as if she would suffocate, and buried her face in her hands, expecting every moment to feel the claws of the terrible animal sink into the flesh of her back.

But at the sound Silver Face leaped to his feet, and was coming swiftly around the fire.

Through the silver mask his eyes were gleaming wickedly.

Stella heard him, and looked up. He was standing before her at the corner of her shelter, his blank face turned toward the place from which the cat's cry had come.

Suddenly a strange thing happened. From the breast of the black garment worn by Silver Face leaped a flame, followed by the crash of a revolver. This was succeeded by another, and a third.

The sleeping men had been aroused, and were sitting up in their blankets, blinking stupidly.

Behind her shelter Stella heard a thrashing among the frozen underbrush, while Silver Face stood immovable, the blazing eyes in the mask staring in that direction.

Meanwhile, Stella was marveling at those shots which

had seemed to spring from his very body, and without the apparent use of his hands.

But soon the noise in the brush ceased, and Silver Face stepped out of sight.

In a moment he was back, and threw into the circle of light about the fire the body of an enormous mountain cat.

The men had fallen back into their blankets and were sleeping again, while Silver Face resumed his place before the fire.

Soon Stella began to yawn, and her eyes grew heavy with sleep.

But she did not want to sleep. She had a foreboding that if she slept she would be in danger.

However, the dancing flames and the soft, comfortable heat which came for the fire were too much for her resolution, and her head began to droop, and presently her body sank gently down, and, as she pillowed her head on her arm, she fell into a deep sleep.

How long she slept she did not know, but when she awoke it was light.

The fire had burned low, and she felt cold and numb.

Staggering to her feet, she looked around. The camp was deserted.

The men were gone, and so were the horses. Beside the fire was a considerable pile of wood, and Stella hastily pulled the embers of the fire together and threw several sticks upon it. As the fire blazed up and she grew warmer she tried to review the situation.

Why had the men who had captured and brought her thus far deserted her? Had they been frightened away by the proximity of the boys? No, it could not have been that, for the boys were far away.

Then a thought of horror flashed across her mind. She had been brought here to perish in the wilderness. Probably Silver Face and his men, desiring to wreak vengeance upon Ted, and feeling that keeping her a prisoner would be too much of a burden, had brought her into this dangerous place to leave her a prey to the wild animals that she knew infested the forest.

If they had only left her Magpie she might have stood some chance of escaping.

But her fortitude soon returned to her. She was not dead yet, and, while she had a fighting chance, she would not despair.

Something of pity must have moved the men, for she found that they had left her revolver and her rifle beside her in the lean-to, and that in a pile not far from the fire was food enough to last her for several meals.

She set about cooking some breakfast, and caught herself singing as she did so.

After she had eaten she sat down in her shelter to think a way out of her predicament.

She was in the midst of a reverie when she was brought to her feet by that most dreaded of sounds—the howl of the timber-wolf.

For a moment she stood trembling, trying to think what her best course would be.

The wolves had smelled the frying bacon from afar, and had been attracted to it, for the scent had carried far in the clear air.

From another direction came another wolf-cry, and presently they seemed to come from every direction.

They were far away as yet, but the wolves were gathering.

Without trying to reason further, Stella gathered up

what food she could carry, and, grasping her rifle, struck out into the forest in the direction away from that from which the howls of the wolves came to her.

Suddenly to one side appeared a slinking gray form, which slunk along, apparently dodging behind the trees, but following her.

As it came from behind a tree in fair sight, she swung her rifle to her shoulder and fired.

It was a strike, for the wolf with a howl of pain sprang in the air, then rolled over on the snow, and lay still.

As the report of the shot reverberated back from the mountains it was followed by a perfect crescendo of wolf-howls.

They sounded louder and nearer now, and Stella's heart began to beat rapidly with fear.

Too well she knew what would happen if they caught her.

But suddenly a thought came to her, and she stopped.

Surely Ted and the boys would come to find her. They might even now be on the way, and who could say they were not far away?

If she could only send them a message to let them know that they were on the right trail!

Her face lighted up with an inspiration. She had the means.

Breaking a stick from a low-growing tree she began to write in the snow:

"I AM FOLLOWED BY A WOLF-PACK. HURRY. STELLA."

These were the words she left behind her for Ted to read should he come that way.

Then she hurried on with all speed.

Every few minutes the howls of the wolves assailed her ears as she struggled on through the snow.

Her burden of food was becoming very heavy, and she cast away a part of it.

Perhaps, she thought, it would serve to stop the wolves for a while when they found it on her trail.

Every moment seemed to bring the cries of the wolves nearer.

They were following in her footsteps now, for the noise was all behind her, not scattered over the forest, as it had been at first.

The brutes had gathered into a pack, and Stella shuddered as she pictured in her mind the gray band coming upon her with long, loping, tireless strides; with red, long, lolling tongues and slaverling, sharp-fanged jaws.

Presently she heard another noise behind her, and looked over her shoulder.

The sight that met her eyes caused her to almost faint.

Not twenty yards behind her was an enormous gray wolf, loping along easily but as swiftly as a horse.

His eyes were blazing like green lamps, and his great body was scarred and torn. Evidently he was the king of the pack.

Stopping suddenly, she drew her revolver and fired two shots at him.

He came to a halt with a snarl of rage and began biting at his shoulder.

Then Stella turned and ran again, with the clamor of the pack close behind her.

But she was failing, and her run had become a painful stagger, and her breath came in gasps.

She was near the end, and she realized it. She fan-

cied herself falling into the midst of that ravenous crew and shuddered. What could she do to save herself?

Not far ahead was a tree with a forked branch growing low enough for her to reach it if she still had strength to get so far. With almost a superhuman effort she continued her flight toward it.

As she reached it the great gray king of the pack was only a few feet behind her, so close that she could hear him pant from his long run.

She reached up to the branch and tried to pull herself up, but it was an impossible task burdened with food, and rifle and her coat, which she had removed at a time when she had stopped long enough to write another message in the snow for Ted.

She threw the rifle in the snow and tried it again, but she could not, and then cast aside the food and the coat, and succeeded in clambering into the sheltering nook just as the great wolf, leaping into the air, swept past her, carrying in his teeth a shred of her skirt. She was safe, but by a very narrow margin.

She looked up into the tree, for the branch upon which she was perched was so near the ground that she was not safe from the leaps of the savage and famished brutes.

But the next higher branch was far beyond her reach or her ability to climb to.

She must defend herself as best she could.

Fortunately she had retained her revolver and had a good supply of ammunition.

As the old wolf leaped again she fired, and knew that the ball had entered his neck. If she could shoot him often enough she ought to kill him after a while.

But now the clamor was all about her. The pack had arrived, and was leaping about the foot of the tree like waves upon a storm-tossed shore.

Her red coat had been torn to shreds, and, in the fight over the food she had cast aside, more than one of the brutes had met his death by the razorlike teeth of his comrades.

Suddenly, through the din about her, Stella lifted her head and listened, while for a moment the wolves ceased leaping and howling and stood listening also.

From afar off, and very faintly, there came to her a subdued cheer. Her heart leaped with hope. Could it be the boys who were signaling to her?

But now the wolves, even more savage than before, were leaping at her, their saber teeth snapping within an inch of her, as she fired into their faces, and laughed as she saw them roll upon the snow in their death agony.

Again she heard a faint cry in the forest. Oh, if she should be wrong, and it was not the dear old Moon Valley yell, she would die.

Now the old king of the pack returned to the attack.

He was bigger and stronger than any of the others, and when he snapped at them with his terrible teeth they made way for him.

He began a succession of leaps at her, and every time she planted a bullet in his massive, and seemingly invulnerable, body.

But each leap brought him closer to her perch.

The next jump might be the one by which he would reach her, she thought, and that surely would be the end, for, if he ever succeeded in getting his hooked fangs fastened in her clothes, she would be pulled from the tree in an eye-winkling, and she shuddered as she thought of the sequel.

The end seemed very near, and she had about given up hope of holding out until the boys could reach her, when a well-known yell was wafted to her on the frozen air. The boys had come.

She felt the fangs of the king of the pack fasten in her skirt, and she knew that she was being pulled out of her perch when, through the woods came Ted, and Bud, and Ben, and the rest of her friends, yelling like mad and amidst a perfect fusillade of rifle-shots.

Then she began to slide out of the tree. But she did not reach the ground, for Ted was there, and she slipped naturally and without harm into his arms, as the last of the pack that remained alive escaped into the forest.

CHAPTER XII.

WHO WHIPPLE WAS.

There was great rejoicing when Stella so far recovered from the strain which she had been undergoing, to learn that Bud was safe, although he had passed a very uncomfortable as well as perilous night tied to a tree with the cold numbing him, and wolves sniffing and snarling at him.

These he had been able to keep off for several hours by kicking them whenever they got close enough.

But he was rapidly becoming exhausted when in the distance he heard shouts.

Ted and the boys had ridden to the west until they realized that it was useless to go any farther, for they had not come upon the trail of Bud and Stella, and Ted came to the conclusion that they had gone in the opposite direction.

But it was almost night when they turned their faces to the east, and day was dawning when they heard Bud's cry for help, and rescued him by driving the snarling pack from his heels.

When they had heard his story about the man with the silver face, and his crew, and the fact that they had taken Stella away with them, the boys waited only long enough to make a fire to thaw out Bud, and to make some coffee, and took up the broad trail.

When they came to the deserted camp they were almost sure that Stella had gone on with her captors, and were about to follow the trail.

Had they done so, Stella would have perished in the woods.

But Ted had one of his "hunches" that Stella was not far away, and rode around the camp in a wide circle.

He was soon rewarded by finding the prints of Stella's shoes in the snow, and, concluding that she had in some manner escaped from her captors, he called the boys together and started on her trail.

They had not gone far when they, too, heard the howls of the wolf-pack, and knew that Stella was in great danger.

Presently they came upon Stella's message in the snow, and obeyed her injunction to hurry.

They had been compelled to leave their horses at the camp, for the forest was too dense to permit them to ride.

When Stella told them of her adventure, and about Silver Face, and the stolen cattle, they decided to push forward on the trail, and, if possible, regain their stolen property.

At the camp they remounted, and, having to ride double where Bud and Stella were concerned, made but slow progress.

But the trail was broad and good, and they made good time as compared with a slow cattle-drive.

Early in the afternoon Ted became conscious, in that remarkable way of his, that not far ahead some one was on the trail.

Stella was riding behind him, for the boys had taken turns in carrying her so as not to burden any one horse too much, and he transferred her to Kit's pony, and, telling the boys to move forward slowly, rode on ahead to scout.

Ted wanted to see for himself this wonderful Silver Face, who was impervious to bullets, and who could fire them from his chest with no apparent effort on his own part.

Ted was also affected as the others had been who had seen him; that is, by the mystery of the creature.

He had ridden quite a distance ahead of the party, and had just entered into the pass of a cañon which seemed to broaden out into a respectable valley farther on, when he was brought to a halt by the scream of a rifle-ball close to his head.

This was warning enough, and he scurried into the shelter of a huge rock that jutted from the cañon wall.

In a few minutes he emerged from it and rode back over the trail.

When the party came up with him he told them of the shot.

"It's my opinion," he said, "that Silver Face and his men and our cattle are in that cañon or valley, but how to reach them I don't know."

"S'pose we go scoutin' on ther hills above, an' take a look," said Bud. "Stella an' ther boys can cache ther hosses an' hide, er come erlong with us."

"Very well," said Ted. And so they did. Hiding their horses in a thick glade of cedar-trees, they climbed in single file up the side of the mountain, and were soon in an advantageous position, from which they had a good view up and down the valley.

A curious sight met their sight.

In the center of the valley they saw their bunch of steers close herded by several cowboys, while not far away two men were butchering one of the steers.

"They're going to have beef for dinner," said Ted, with a grin.

"I hope it chokes 'em," growled Bud.

"Or that they never get a chance to eat it at all," said Stella.

Lounging around the fire were a party of Indians, but, though Ted could not see from that distance whether or not they were the followers of Crazy Cow, he thought most likely they were.

The great figure of Silver Face could easily be picked out from among his followers, even were it not from the reflected light from his silver mask whenever the rays of the sun smote it.

Close to the west wall of the valley, and huddled under its shelter, were a number of Indian teepees, while farther on were several white canvas tents.

"Boys, we've stumbled upon the permanent camp or rendezvous of the outlaw Indians, and the members of the Whipple gang," said Ted.

As they were looking they saw a young woman, dressed as cowgirl, and with long blond hair hanging down her back, come out of one of the tents, and look over the scene.

Silver Face strode to her side, and then began a strange pantomime between the pair with their hands. This convinced Stella that the man with the silver mask was unable to talk.

"I don't see how we are going to get at those fellows," said Ted.

"They do seem to be pretty well fixed to defend themselves," said Ben, who was lying flat on the rocky edge of the cañon wall, looking into the scene below.

"Oh, Ted," cried Stella, grasping the arm of the King of the Wild West. "Look there. It is Magpie, my pony. There isn't another like him in the world. We must get him back, Ted. Think of letting a dirty Indian outlaw ride and abuse the splendid fellow."

"All right, Stella," replied Ted. "Show us how to do it successfully, and we'll go down and tackle the whole mess."

"See, there's an Indian throwing his filthy blanket on Magpie's back. I can't stand that."

Stella put her rifle to her shoulder, and was about to pull the trigger when Ted's hand closed down over the lock of the weapon.

"Not on your life," he said. "This is not the time for anything like that. If we were to get them after us right now we'd last about as long as a snowball on a hot stove. Wait a while."

While Stella said nothing she was angry clear through. It hurt her like a blow to have her pony ridden by another.

The Indian, having fastened his blanket on the pony's back to his satisfaction, sprang upon his back, and began to lash him with a quirt.

"Oh, the brute!" exclaimed Stella. "I hope Magpie throws and kills him for his cruelty."

Magpie wheeled and bucked under the unusual punishment, and the Indian continued to beat him.

"I can't stand it any longer," cried Stella, gnashing her pretty, small, white teeth.

This time she got her rifle to her shoulder, and, before she could be restrained, had fired a shot. Perhaps Ted knew that the provocation was great, for he did not interfere this time.

At any rate, the ball flew close enough to knock the hat from the Indian's head, and cause him to dismount and scurry to the shelter of the rock wall.

But it caused the greatest excitement in the camp.

The man with the silver mask rushed forward, rapidly scanning the cliff for whoever had fired the shot.

He did not have long to search, for the smoke hovering over the spot where Stella was lying on the top of the cliff was advertisement enough.

A man by his side handed him a rifle, which he sighted, then took down as a puff of smoke rose above him.

Then there followed the smash of a bullet on the rock, a foot below where Stella was lying.

"Pretty close work," said Ted. "That fellow is a corking good shot. Look, he's coming to shoot again. Duck! I'll bet he gets the range this time."

Every head went out of sight. Then came the sharp report of the rifle, and the ball from it shattered the edge of the rock not far from Stella's head.

"That'll be about enough of that," said Ted, picking up his own Winchester. "We'll have to stop that fellow's fun, or he'll end by hurting some of us."

Ted poked the barrel of his Winchester over the edge of the rock, adjusted the sights, took a short aim, and fired.

Then he looked to see the result of it, and saw the man with the silver face drop his rifle, stagger to the side of the cañon, and sink down.

"By Jove! I got him," exclaimed Ted. "I believe that from here we can drive that whole bunch out of the valley and get back our cattle and horses, if we dodge back and shoot straight. We'll try it. Every fellow get ready to fire."

On seeing their leader fall, the men, both white and red, in the valley, ran hither and yon in a state of great excitement.

But when the boys began to fire systematically at them, kicking up the snow about them with every shot, it became a veritable panic.

Shouts of terror were heard, and, as the young woman raised the man with the silver mask to his feet and helped him walk to the tent, the others hastily saddled their ponies, and prepared to decamp.

All the while the boys were pumping Winchester balls into them, and occasionally a horse dropped, or with a yell a man would grasp a leg or an arm and fall to the ground.

"We've got them going," shouted Ted. "Keep it up until we get them on the run."

The boys fired their rifles until they got hot, then waited for them to cool, and resumed firing.

It was like Bedlam in the valley, and not one of the men attempted to retaliate by firing back. They were in a panic of fear.

As soon as one got his horse saddled he dashed away toward the head of the valley out of the way of those spiteful bullets which sang about them like enraged hornets.

Not one of them stopped to burden himself with his baggage, nor did they pay any attention to the stolen cattle.

They were in too much of a hurry to get away safely themselves.

The Indians left their teepees standing, and ran for their lives.

Soon the valley was clear of men. All that remained in sight were the bunch of cattle, a small band of ponies in a rope corral, and the teepees and tents.

"I guess we're safe to go down now, and take possession of our own," said Ted.

"Don't forget that Silver Face and the young woman are in that tent," said Stella warningly. "Look out for treachery."

Without further delay the boys and Stella climbed down the mountain to where their horses were, and, mounting, rode fearlessly into the valley.

As they approached the tents the flap of one of them was pushed back and the young woman came out.

Her hand was raised for silence, and the tears were coursing down her cheeks.

"Hush!" she said. "He is dead."

"Who is dead?" asked Ted, with the greatest respect.

"Silver Face," was the answer.

"Who was he?" asked Ted.

"I don't know. I found him lying in the mountains almost dead from an accident a few months ago, and nursed him back to life, but he never spoke again, and he has never been able to let me know who he was."

"Pardon me, but who are you?" asked Ted.

"I?" said the woman, drawing herself up proudly. "I am Whipple."

"What? Leader of the Whipple gang?" asked Ted, almost incredulously.

"The same," said she. "I have laughed many times at the fear I inspired among you ranchmen in the valley, and the officers of the law, to say nothing of the soldiers. But that was because they had never seen me, and believed me to be a man."

They all looked their astonishment, for she was an exceedingly pretty woman, and spoke in gentle tones.

"But it is all over now," she continued sadly. "If those steers and ponies are yours take them. I am going to leave the mountains, and my men are scattered and will leave also. I told them to go. And now that Silver Face is no more there is no reason why I should stay here."

"You loved him?" asked Ted, nodding toward the tent.

"Yes," she answered quietly. "He was my husband. When I had nursed him back to life I sent my boys out and kidnaped a preacher. I had him brought here blindfolded, and made him marry us, then sent him back, not knowing where he had been."

Ted and the boys looked their sympathy.

"Can I be of any assistance to you in caring for him?" asked Stella, very sweetly.

A look of terror crossed the woman's face.

"No, no," she cried. "Leave me with my dead. Take what belongs to you and go."

She retired into the tent, and they heard her weeping, and turned away.

The boys started immediately on the back trail to the ranch, where they arrived with their cattle and ponies.

That was the last of the Whipple gang, for the members of it left the country, and the outlaw Indians were gathered in by the troops and the Indian police, and imprisoned on the reservations.

But on winter evenings, as he sat before the big fire in the Long Tom ranch-house, his big snow camp, Ted Strong, King of the Wild West, often turned over in his mind the facts about the death of Silver Face, the man of mystery.

Somehow, away down in his heart, he did not believe that the man with the silver mask was dead, but that he would some day meet him again and solve the mystery that surrounded him.

THE END.

The title of the next number of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, No. 150, will be "King of the Wild West's Great Wolf Hunt; or, Stella Conquers White Fang." This story takes the reader to the great Southwest, where things happen swiftly, and where sport is of the robust kind. Ted, Stella, Bud, and all the other rough riders have plenty to do punching cows, riding the great plains, and ridding the ranges of those worst of the ranchman's enemies, the great wolves of the alkali and sage-brush flats. It is intensely exciting and full of adventure and sport.

A CHAT WITH YOU.

EDITORIAL NOTE.—The deluge of letters of praise pouring into our editorial rooms has impelled us to open this department, where, from week to week, we may meet our multitude of enthusiastic young readers and answer various questions concerning sports afield. If you desire to know anything connected with outdoor life, hunting, fishing, fur-collecting, or cowboy life on the plains, ask freely, since on our staff we have editors who are thoroughly posted in all that pertains to healthy sport in the open. In many cases we may have to abbreviate letters; but it shall be our aim to print everything that we believe must prove of interest to the great body of our readers.

SPECIAL NOTICE—Owing to the great number of letters still coming, and the unabated interest shown in connection with our cash prize competition, we have concluded to extend the time a month or two, so that every boy may have a chance. If you have up to now failed to enter your letter in the contest, there is still time to do so. We shall positively print the full name and address of every prize winner in this column, when the competition has closed.

Readers of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, did you ever hear of a drove of sea-horses? Well, there is a drove of these creatures at the aquarium in New York. Recently fourteen were added to the magnificent collection of rare fishes in this place. They were caught near Atlantic City, N. J., and two of them measured nearly six inches. This is pretty large for these waters. While they are small, compared with other curious monsters that have their home in the deep black waters of the ocean, they generally appeal to the observer as being quite remarkable. I have been in the aquarium a number of times since the sea-horses were put in the tanks, and I have noticed that people never get tired looking at these strange animals. When Ted Strong comes to New York City I want to know it, so that I can take him to the aquarium and show him these mysterious creatures.

New York City.

FRANK MATTHEWS.

Ted saw these same sea-horses the day after they were placed on exhibition. He had taken a hurried trip from his ranch to New York on a matter of business, and, as he wanted to see if they looked like the horses he had on the Moon Valley Ranch, he went to the aquarium to take a squint at them. Bud Morgan was with him, as he also wanted to see a little of New York. When he saw the sea-horses he was a little disappointed, as they did not come up to his expectations as to just what they looked like. He turned away from the tank where they were kept, and remarked regretfully to Ted that "it sure was a horse on him that time!"

(A letter from New York.)

I have read several numbers of *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, and I think they contain the best stories I ever read.

M. C. ALDERMAN.

They are without question the best stories you ever read.

(A letter from Iowa.)

I am a constant reader of *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* and *Tip Top Weekly*. I have read almost all of them since I was able to read. I can honestly say that they are the best stories I ever read. The characters represented are true to life, and are ideals to model after.

HARRY WERT.

Model your conduct on Ted's, and you will grow up to manhood, truthful, honest, brave, and manly.

I have read *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, and I think it beats all of the other books. It is the finest and best weekly published. I think Ted is one of the bravest and best boys I ever heard of. Bud Morgan is a fine cowboy, and suited to be the friend of Ted. Ben and the rest of the rough riders are also fine fellows.

The *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* is the only book I read now. I think Ted would be a fine example to all the boys of America. New York City.

MERRICK MORAN.

This letter will probably be of interest to our young friends, as it expresses what they have said and believe to be true regarding their favorite weekly.

(A letter from Maryland.)

I have read every one of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLIES* from No. 1 to date. I just think that Ted Strong and his men are the best boys I ever read about. I can hardly wait from one week until the next for the weekly to appear.

KATE WILEY.

What a fine sight to see Ted Strong galloping over the plains on his horse Sultan!

(A letter from New York.)

I have read a good many different kinds of books, but the *ROUGH RIDERS* are the best I have read. I was getting the *All-Sports Library* till they got out of print; then I started to get the *ROUGH RIDERS*. *All-Sports* was very good, but I think *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* is the best.

LOUIS ANTHONY.

Stick to the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, and you will never lack good reading.

I have read the last number of *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, and think it is one of the best stories I have ever read. I buy the book every week. I hope you will publish another good story like that soon.

FRANK GROVES.

Richmond, Va.

Read next week's story, and tell us what you think of it.

(A letter from Pennsylvania.)

I am an ardent admirer of *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, and delight to read about the Western adventures of Ted Strong.

IRVIN REX.

How would you like to join the band of rough riders?

Ted Strong, or the King of the Wild West, as he is called, is a brave and true man. No one could ever accuse the King of the Wild West of possessing a hard heart. He is noted for his bravery as well as his company of rough riders. He is always willing to help others.

JOHN JOHANNES.

Baltimore, Md.

The young rough riders are a fearless lot, and Ted, their leader, is the bravest of them all.

(A letter from Maine.)

I think that the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* is all right, and the boys are all brave and strong fellows. They had some exciting adventures in No. 100, "The Chase for the Klondike Diamond."

A. W. SMITH.

The young rough riders are better known throughout the country than any number of young men in the eyes of the public.

(A letter from Connecticut.)

I thought I would write and let you know what I thought about the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLIES*. I like them, as they tell about the life on ranches and the cowboys.

GEORGE McMAHON.

The most interesting feature of *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* is the series of pictures of ranch-life it contains.

(A letter from New York.)

I have read a good many books, and will say I have never read a book I liked so well as *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. In regard to "The King of the Wild West in Siberia," I will say I don't believe I ever read a book that was so interesting and exciting. It is exciting from the beginning to the last word on the last page. I have read a great many *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLIES*. I thought they were fine stories when the boys were out on the ranch.

WILL F. BALCH.

There is not one story in *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* which is not more interesting than the stories in other Wild West libraries.

(A letter from Massachusetts.)

I am a reader of *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* and *Tip Top*. I find that Ted Strong is a very bright, intelligent, keen guide, and a brave youth. A good name for him would be the "Wizard of the West."

HAROLD F. TUPPER.

The "Wizard of the West" would be an appropriate name for Ted. He does so many startling things that other people cannot do that it makes one feel as if he were a kind of wizard.

I have been reading your *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* ever since it was first published. I think it contains the best stories that I ever read.

S. H. T.

Paden City, W. Va.

Adventure, fights with outlaws, breaking wild horses, roping steers, etc., are a few of the interesting things we read about in *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*.

(A letter from Maine.)

Having read *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* for a year, I write to tell you what I think of Ted Strong and his set.

I think they are all right, and that they are always around when wanted. They can deliver the goods.

There are just two weeklies that I read—*Tip Top* and *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. I would not try to get along without them.

Hoping they will always be printed, I remain,

CHARLES WATTS.

This reader shows all the enthusiasm of a satisfied person, and well he might be, for *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* contains stories of interest to everybody.

(A letter from Indiana.)

I thought I would write and tell you what I think of *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* entitled "King of the Wild West's Meteor; or, The Race for the Klondike Diamond." I have read lots of Wild West stories, but the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* is the best yet.

HAROLD MURRAY.

Ted, Bud, and Ben are a great trio. They do wonderful things, and have become known throughout the United States as the bravest young men living in the West to-day.

(A letter from Mississippi.)

I have read *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* from No. 1 up, and don't think it can be equaled, as far as Western stories go. Even Ned Buntline's stories, or the stories about Kit Carson, can't equal it.

E. WAKEFIELD.

The author of these stories lived a number of years in the West, and knows all about the section of the country he writes about, and is familiar with the characters.

(A letter from New York.)

I think *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* is a very fine library. I like Ted Strong and his friends very much.

JAMES F. KELLOGG.

There have been a number of imitations of *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* since it became so popular, but none have remained in existence very long, as they failed to come up to the high standard set by the stories of Ned Taylor, the cowboy author.

(A letter from Long Island.)

I am a reader of *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. I have read others, but it beats them all.

WALTER E. ACKLEY.

Continue to read *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, and you will always be entertained by bright, interesting stories of Western life.

(A letter from Maryland.)

I can say that I think *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* has the best stories I ever read. I have read nearly all the back numbers, and I like them better than any other story.

WM. FERGUSON.

Ted Strong and his band of young rough riders are absolutely fearless. None of the boys know what danger means.

(A letter from Pennsylvania.)

I have just finished reading the latest *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. I am very fond of the stories.

Every week I make a dive for the news-stand to get it. Ted Strong and his rough riders are a fine bunch. Whatever Ted takes on him to do, he sticks to it until he does it.

I have induced many boys to read *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, and they say they are glad I did.

JOHN LOGAN.

Tell those friends whom you induced to read *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* to put a copy of the library in the hands of their friends so that the latter can begin to enjoy themselves as much as the rest of *ROUGH RIDER* enthusiasts.

(A letter from Pennsylvania.)

I have read many *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLIES*, and I like the last number the best of all.

HARRY E. STARNER.

That story was a great one. We have had many letters regarding it.

(A letter from Maine.)

I have just finished reading the last number of *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, and think it the best one of the series that I ever read.

Although I have read only a few of the weeklies, I think they contain the best Western stories published.

CHARLEY ROBINSON.

Do not fail to order next week's *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* from your news-dealer, as it is the best number which has yet appeared.

(A letter from Illinois.)

I think No. 99, as well as later issues, contains a good story.

I felt sorry for Ted, but I had to laugh when Ted brought that Chinese boy to Miss McFarland, thinking it was the Chinese girl, Yuen Ho.

I was glad to have him put the handcuffs on the magistrate from Vermont and have him beg like a baby to have them taken off.

It served him right for interfering with Ted's business.

Ted was in luck to become a friend of Hal Barrett. He might not have found Yuen Ho had he not met Hal Barrett.

I was glad the boys came to Ted's room that night. The four Chinamen were going to kill Ted. It might have been the last of Ted Strong, the King of the Wild West.

RALPH GARDINER.

Ted certainly deserves the name King of the Wild West.

(A letter from Pennsylvania.)

I think that, next to *Tip Top*, I would advise any boy who wanted good reading to read *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. I have read them from No. 1 up to the present date. Ted and Bud are my favorites.

I think Mr. Taylor is almost equal to Burt L. Standish as an author.

ELLIS WILSON.

This reader is very enthusiastic, and has good cause to be.

(A letter from Wisconsin.)

I have read several of your books, and take great interest in them. I must say that Ted and his men had many narrow escapes, and went through many strange adventures.

BESSIE W. BECKMAN.

This letter is from a charming girl reader who thinks that there is no one like Ted Strong, and she is right!

(A letter from California.)

I think the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLIES* are fine. All the boys around our neighborhood read them before all other books. We have read them for about three years. The men in our town read *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* as much as the boys.

MOORE STUART.

The *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* stories interest adults as well as young people.

THE ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY MONDAY.

HANDSOME COLORED COVER

Ted Strong wants to make your acquaintance, boys, and we are convinced that you will be proud to have him as a friend. The tales of his adventures among the cowboys are full of fascinating interest. He is known to every one as "King of the Wild West" and he upholds the title.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, postpaid, by the publishers upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

- 126—King of the Wild West's Strategy; or, Stella's Trick Pony.
- 127—King of the Wild West's Tangled Trail; or, The Disappearance of Stella.
- 128—King of the Wild West's Long Ride; or, Stella Lost on the Red Mesa.
- 129—King of the Wild West's Phantom; or, Stella in Danger.
- 130—King of the Wild West's Broncho-busters; or, Stella's Fort in the Coulee.
- 131—King of the Wild West's Corral; or, How Stella Brought the Warning.
- 132—King of the Wild West's Tenderfoot Pard; or, Stella's Surprise Party.
- 133—King of the Wild West's Night Wrangler; or, What Happened to Stella.
- 134—King of the Wild West's Outlaw; or, Stella to the Rescue.
- 135—King of the Wild West at the Throttle; or, Stella in the Flames.
- 136—King of the Wild West's Trail; or, Stella Finds Bill Blue.
- 137—King of the Wild West's Race; or, Stella Among the Seris.
- 138—King of the Wild West's Fire-signal; or, How Stella Foiled the Marauders.

- 139—King of the Wild West Rides the Line; or, Stella Saves Old Glory.
- 140—King of the Wild West's Treasure; or, Stella on the Walls of Montezuma.
- 141—King of the Wild West's Totem; or, Stella Makes a New Maxim.
- 142—King of the Wild West on the Box; or, Stella in the Mountains.
- 143—King of the Wild West's Slick Trick; or, Stella Buys a Town.
- 144—King of the Wild West on Vanishing Island; or, Stella Solves an Enigma.
- 145—King of the Wild West's Decision; or, Stella's Waif of the Plains.
- 146—King of the Wild West's Broken Cinch; or, Stella's Stratagem.
- 147—King of the Wild West's Iron Box; or, Stella Turns the Tables.
- 148—King of the Wild West's Lost Brand; or, Stella in "No Man's Land."
- 149—King of the Wild West's Snow Camp; or, Stella Lost in the Wilderness.
- 150—King of the Wild West's Great Wolf-hunt; or, Stella Conquers "White Fang."
- 151—King of the Wild West at the Lone Tree; or, Stella Finds the Mother Lode.

IF YOU WANT ANY BACK NUMBERS of our libraries and cannot procure them from newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Cut out and fill in the following order blank and send it to us with the price of the books you want and we will send them to you by return mail. POSTAGE STAMPS TAKEN THE SAME AS MONEY.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Gentlemen:—Enclosed find cents for which please send me:

.....copies of TIP TOP	Nos.....copies of BUFFALO BILL	Nos.....
....." " NICK CARTER	Nos....." " BRAVE AND BOLD	Nos.....
....." " DIAMOND DICK	Nos....." " ROUGH RIDER	Nos.....
Name.....	Street and No.....	Town.....	State.....

**About the
Early
Numbers of**

TIP TOP WEEKLY

WE receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print. We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We give herewith a complete list of all stories that have been published in book form up to the present writing.

MEDAL LIBRARY

AT 10 CENTS

- 150—Frank Merriwell's Schooldays.
- 167—Frank Merriwell's Chums.
- 178—Frank Merriwell's Foes.
- 184—Frank Merriwell's Trip West.
- 189—Frank Merriwell Down South.
- 193—Frank Merriwell's Bravery.
- 197—Frank Merriwell's Hunting Tour.
- 201—Frank Merriwell in Europe.
- 205—Frank Merriwell at Yale.
- 209—Frank Merriwell's Sports Afield.
- 213—Frank Merriwell's Races.
- 217—Frank Merriwell's Bicycle Tour.
- 225—Frank Merriwell's Courage.
- 229—Frank Merriwell's Daring.
- 233—Frank Merriwell's Athletes.
- 237—Frank Merriwell's Skill.
- 240—Frank Merriwell's Champions.
- 244—Frank Merriwell's Return to Yale.
- 247—Frank Merriwell's Secret.
- 251—Frank Merriwell's Danger.
- 254—Frank Merriwell's Loyalty.
- 258—Frank Merriwell in Camp.
- 262—Frank Merriwell's Vacation.
- 267—Frank Merriwell's Cruise.
- 271—Frank Merriwell's Chase.
- 276—Frank Merriwell in Maine.
- 280—Frank Merriwell's Struggle.
- 284—Frank Merriwell's First Job.
- 288—Frank Merriwell's Opportunity.
- 292—Frank Merriwell's Hard Luck.

AT 10 CENTS

- 296—Frank Merriwell's Protégé.
- 300—Frank Merriwell on the Road.
- 304—Frank Merriwell's Own Company.
- 308—Frank Merriwell's Fame.
- 312—Frank Merriwell's College Chums.
- 316—Frank Merriwell's Problem.
- 320—Frank Merriwell's Fortune.
- 324—Frank Merriwell's New Comedian.
- 328—Frank Merriwell's Prosperity.
- 332—Frank Merriwell's Stage Hit.
- 336—Frank Merriwell's Great Scheme.
- 340—Frank Merriwell in England.
- 344—Frank Merriwell on the Boulevards.
- 348—Frank Merriwell's Duel.
- 352—Frank Merriwell's Double Shot.
- 356—Frank Merriwell's Baseball Victories.
- 359—Frank Merriwell's Confidence.
- 362—Frank Merriwell's Auto.
- 365—Frank Merriwell's Fun.
- 368—Frank Merriwell's Generosity.
- 371—Frank Merriwell's Tricks.
- 374—Frank Merriwell's Temptation.
- 377—Frank Merriwell on Top.

AT 15 CENTS

(Increased Size)

- 380—Frank Merriwell's Luck.
- 383—Frank Merriwell's Mascot.
- 386—Frank Merriwell's Reward.
- 389—Frank Merriwell's Phantom.

¶ We will be glad to send a fine complete catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, NEW YORK CITY



THE FAVORITE LIST OF FIVE-CENT LIBRARIES



Rough Rider Weekly

Ted Strong was appointed deputy marshal by accident, but he resolves to use his authority and rid his ranch of some very tough bullies. He does it in such a slick way that everyone calls him "King of the Wild West" and he certainly deserves his title. \$100 in cash are given to the readers of this publication, Buy a copy and learn how to come in for a share of it.

MIGHT AND MAIN



These are stories of the adventures of boys who succeeded in climbing the ladder of fame by honest effort. No more interesting tales can be imagined. Each number is at least one-third longer than the ordinary five-cent library.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

The demand for stirring stories of Western adventure is admirably filled by this library. Every up-to-date boy ought to read just how law and order are established and maintained on our Western plains by Diamond Dick, Bertie, and Handsome Harry.



BUFFALO BILL STORIES



Buffalo Bill is the hero of a thousand exciting adventures among the Redskins. These are given to our boys only in the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are bound to interest and please you.

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

We know, boys, that there is no need of introducing to you Nicholas Carter, the greatest sleuth that ever lived. Every number containing the adventures of Nick Carter has a peculiar, but delightful, power of fascination.



BRAVE AND BOLD



Every boy who prefers variety in his reading matter, ought to be a reader of Brave and Bold. All these were written by authors who are past masters in the art of telling boys' stories. Every tale is complete in itself.

BOWERY BOY LIBRARY

The adventures of a poor waif whose only name is "Bowery Billy." Billy is the true product of the streets of New York. No boy can read the tales of his trials without imbibing some of that resource and courage that makes the character of this homeless boy stand out so prominently.



The Tip Top Weekly

Frank Merriwell and his brother Dick are known and loved by over one hundred and fifty thousand of the best boys in the United States. They are both clean-cut, vigorous fellows who dare to do right no matter what the consequences. Get the current number. We are sure you will like it.

